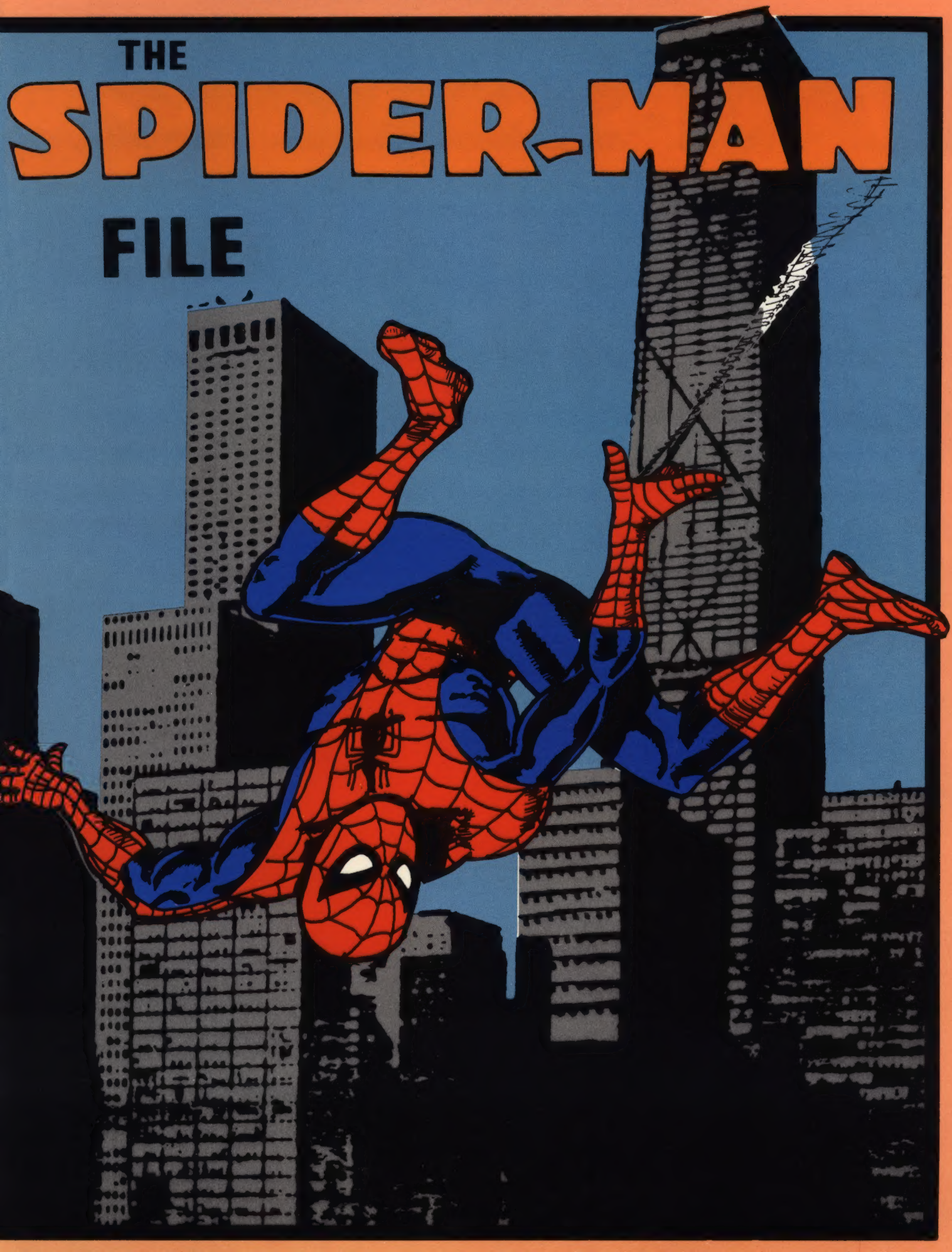
COMICS FILE MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT ON:

THE SPIDER-MAN FILE



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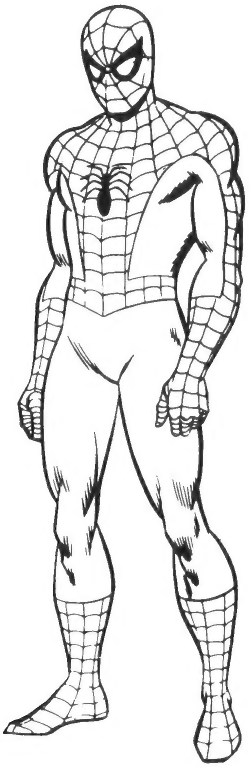

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Comics File Magazine is published to provide a historical record of that phase of American popular culture known as comic books, to help to provide a reference tool and a review tool to panelologists in their efforts to preserve the record of the accomplishments of the talented creators working in that field, for whatever company. If this book helps to assist in any way then it will admirably have served the purpose for which it was created.

COMIC FILES MAGAZINE SERIES EDITED BY HAL SCHUSTER

FOR STEVE DITKO — THE MAN WHO WAS SPIDER-MAN

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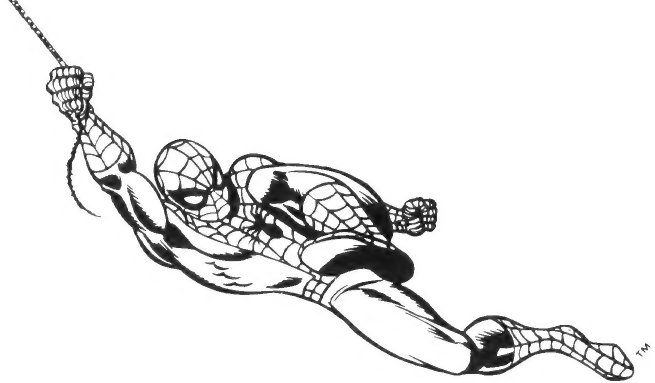

Introduction

Spider-Man is the common man elevated to a position where heroism is thrust upon him, but that doesn't mean he knows what to do with it. Peter Parker, loner and outcast became Spider-Man, super-powered loner and outcast. When fate granted him superhuman powers, perfect wisdom did not come with his enhanced abilities. Like an ordinary person flushed with sudden success, he became self-centered, and made a stupid mistake that would haunt him for the rest of his life. When he blithly chose not to help a security guard capture a fleeing felon, he unknowingly brought about his Uncle's murder. Thus he found that the life of a superhero didn't make his existence any better at all, just very different. While heroes like The Flash, Green Lantern and The Atom rose to the occasion and made all the right decisions when they gained their miraculous abilities, they were the ideal. They acted the way we'd hope to be able to act in the same circumstances. But Spider-Man was far more recognizeable as the way we probably would act in that he was so intoxicated with his powers that he became cocksure in the belief that, because he was a superhero that everything he did must be right. He smartened up fast, but not fast enough. Until Spider-Man came along, superheroes just didn't make mistakes that cost people their lives, unless is was due to clever tricks of some super-villain! Until he wised up, Spider-Man was his own worst enemy. J. Jonah Jameson just finished what Peter had started.

It's interesting the way that Peter's social life was affected by his dual identity. Instead of being depressed and upset by the putdowns of Flash Thompson and others, he drew an inner strength from the knowledge that he had a secret that would have them laughing out of the other side of their face if they knew. It gave Parker self-confidence and he had the acquired wisdom to weigh the consequences of his actions that prevented him from revealing his secret just to get a cheap thrill out of the reaction of his classmates. Even as Spider-Man this spilled over when he'd appear before them, such as in his battle with The Sandman (issue 4) when he wondered what the kids would think he they knew that they were cheering on "Puny Parker." Tell that there weren't a lot of us back in 1964 who couldn't identify with that!

While today Spider-Man is still supposed to be the symbol of the loner and the outcast, he isn't, really, any more. Plans are afoot for him to wed Mary Jane Watson and he's even revealed his secret identity to her in the newspaper strip. Despite repeated attempts to recapture the almost *film noir* approach of the early Sixties, Spider-Man is largely a different character these days. Within these pages we'll see how the evolution took place and whether he really is still the Common Man as superhero.

THE EARLY YEARS

Twenty years.

Twenty years of Spider-Man.

It's hard to believe!

Back in the beginning, in the early '60s, it seemed that each month would never roll around so that the faithful comics reader could wend his way to the neighborhood newsstand to learn what disasters had befallen our web-spinning hero, Peter Parker, that issue. Was that really any more than a few brief yesterdays ago? Now, two decades down the road, "Spidey", as he was nicknamed early on, appears in several titles per month, with once-"professional wallflower" Parker even getting his real name on the masthead of one, and the early issues being reprinted in

AMAZING
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AUG
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THOUGH THE WORLD MAY MOCK PETER PARKER, THE TIMID TEEN AGER...
SPIDER-MAN
...IT WILL SOON MARVEL AT THE AWESOME MIGHT OF SPIDER-MAN!

another, while the world's most famous loner regularly teams up with other Marvel stalwarts in a third; and the still-faithful fan, now an adult with adult responsibilities and demands upon his time, can barely keep up with the wall-crawler's many exploits.

Another casualty of Spider-Man's popularity, longevity, and resultant proclivity has been his time-frame with reference to the real world. Even hypothesizing that Peter Parker was a mere fifteen or sixteen, instead of the high school senior the stories called him when he received his amazing powers, the celebration of his twentieth anniversary brings home the fact that if "Marvel time" is the same as "real time", Peter must be in his mid-thirties and thus the world's oldest college graduate student. The days when this Spider-fan could look on his hero as an older-brother figure, experiencing high school to the reader's junior high and entering college as the reader entered high school, are gone for good. Although not the time-frozen archetype that DC's Superman has become, Spidey/Parker now ages at a slower rate than us mere "Earth-Real" types. Immortality, it would seem, is the price of fame...at least in comic books.

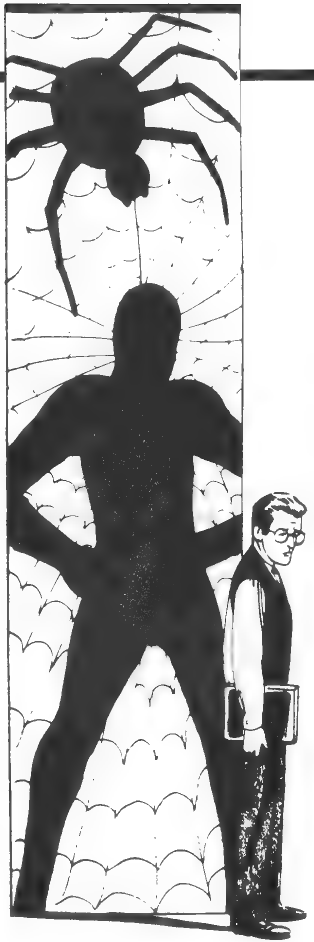
Let's turn a nostalgic eye on the webbed wonder's two decades of pratfalls together, shall we?

THE LEE/DITKO YEARS

But just how did the Spider-magic begin?

Many are the stories of how Stan Lee created Spider-Man, how Stan and Jack Kirby created him and then offered the artist position on the strip to Steve Ditko, and how Stan and Steve co-created Spidey. Twenty years ago, we fans knew nothing of these alternate versions of our hero's origins and cared less. All that mattered was that Stan Lee had thought up Spidey, and Steve Ditko had given him a very special life — the result was the only one of Marvel's then-small-but-homey line-up of less than a dozen titles whose sales and popularity matched those of the flagship **Fantastic Four**. Both **Amazing Fantasy** 15, the final issue of an adult fantasy comic in which Stan took the opportunity to present Spider-Man's origin,and the first issue of **Amazing Spider-Man** (so named so as to preserve the "memory" of the "parent" comic) appeared in 1962, the latter in December bearing the cover date March 1963, the same as **Tales of Suspense** 39 in which Iron Man made his bow.

As did most of the other early Marvel heroes, Spider-Man got his powers through the mysterious agency of radiation. Where the FF had been bombarded by cosmic rays on a rocket flight and the Hulk created in the blast of a gamma bomb, Peter Parker, in somewhat less spectacular fashion, ambled into a reserach lab and was bitten by an accidentally irradiated spider, thus gaining the arachnid's proportionate abilities. There had been heroes with insectoid powers before, notably Archie's concurrent Fly, and even heroes with Spider motifs such as MLJ's Web and DC's Tarantula in the Forties (not to mention the pulp avenger



ACCIDENTALLY ABSORBING A FANTASTIC AMOUNT OF RADIOACTIVITY, THE DYING INSECT, IN SUDDEN SHOCK, BITES THE NEAREST LIVING THING, AT THE SPLIT SECOND BEFORE LIFE EBBS FROM ITS RADIOACTIVE BODY!
OW!
A A SPIDER! IT BIT ME! BUT, WHY IS IT FLUTTERING SO? WHY IS IT SLOWING THAT WAY??
E-I'VE GOT TO HAVE TIME TO THINK! I'VE GOT TO PLAN WAYS TO END WITH THIS UNBELIEVABLE ABILITY WHICH FATE HAS GIVEN ME!
I'LL FASTEN ONE TO EACH ARM. IT'LL OPERATE BY THE SLIGHTEST PRESSURE OF ANY FINGER!
I'LL NEED A NAME. WELL, GUESS SPIDERMAN IS AS GOOD AS ANY! IT LOOKS PRETTY GOOD, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF!
HEY! WHAT'S GOIN' ON??
IT TO THE ELEVATOR, HE'LL GET AWAY!
WAIT'S BETTER YOU ASSIST IT, ALL YOU WANNA DO WAS TRY TO GET AWAY! JUST FOR A MINUTE!
UNCLE BEN — DEAD! NO! NO, IT CAN'T BE!
AND THEN HE PRESSES ON THE BUTTONS!
IT'S THE FUGITIVE WHO RAN PAST ME! THE ONE I DIDN'T STOP WHEN I HAD THE CHANCE!

known as the Spider), but Spider-Man was somehow the first hero to make spidery powers look, well, neat. Formerly a shy homebody, brainy bookworm, and social outcast among his high-school peers, Parker could now revel secretly in being able to lift tremendous weights, walk on walls and ceilings in defiance of gravity, perform incredible acrobatic feats, sense the approach of danger thanks to his built-in warning "spider-sense", and, after he added a pair of self-invented web-shooters to his arsenal, swing across the New York skyline Tarzan-fashion at a pretty amazing clip. So what if he couldn't fly like Superman or like the winged-insect-powered heroes? Who needed flight when you could be Spider-Man?

Like most of the early Marvel gang, Spidey had a unique speech pattern, thanks to the scripting of Stan Lee. As problem-ridden Peter Parker, constantly vying for dates, avoiding jock classmate Flash Thompson, striving to make ends meet, and trying to do right by his surrogate parents, Uncle Ben and Aunt May (of whom only the latter survived the origins story), our hero could soliloquize in Shakespearean fashion (a favorite technique of Lee's which he practically trademarked in comics), with the best of them. As Spider-Man, his forte was a constant stream of witticisms and wisecracks the likes of which could never have sprung from the lips of the uncostumed Parker. Of the 60s Marvel heroes, only the FF's Thing, in the jocular pose he assumed between fits of depression, could match Spidey's repertoire of one-liners. For every stock catchphrase his antagonists would mouth, Spider-Man had a ready retort to make them look foolish. Bursting into a villain's hideout would invariably cause the evildoer to exclaim "Spider-Man!" in alarm, to which Spidey would reply, "Well, I sure ain't Albert Schweitzer!" Encountering the web-spinner for a second time, the villain would cry, "You again!", setting himself up for Spidey's "What do you mean, me **again**? I've **always** been me!" Corny? Of course, but it gave Spider-Man yet another weapon in the fight for comics hero supremacy in that his readers not only wanted to **be** like Spidey, they even wanted to **talk** like Spidey (ever hear anyone claim they wanted to grow up to talk like Superman?). Eventually, the repartee, which Parker undoubtedly began as a device to keep up his own confidence in his earliest exploits, became a part of his crook-catching arsenal, such as when The Green Goblin exclaimed in the midst of battle in issue 23: "You talk so much you get me all confused!", whereupon spidey realized, "I've got a new weapon I didn't even know about — my spider speech!"

The thing that really set Spider-Man apart from the Fantastic Four, Thor, the Hulk, Ant-Man, and Iron Man, however, was the unique artwork of Steve Ditko. Although he would draw the Hulk in his own strip in the Green Goliath's later run in **Tales To Astonish**, the two main Ditko vehicles of the early Marvel Age were Spider-Man and Dr. Strange, the mysterious mystic then appearing in the back pages of **Strange Tales**. A less speedy artist than Marvel

workhorse Jack Kirby, who then drew several full books per month, Ditko made his two strips his own personal property to the extent that when he left Marvel in 1966, subsequent Spidey and "Doc" artists had only two choices: to ignore the past and vitually recreate the character visually (as John Romita would do with Spider-Man), or to swipe blatantly from Ditko himself in an effort to preserve the strip's artistic flavor. Ditko's Peter Parker attended a high school where the perpetual blue-suited alter ego of our protagonist somehow did not look out of place in the same class with the sweater-wearing Flash. His everyday characters grimaced and laughed and gestured like no one else's in comics. His Spider-Man was the only version to date who looked believable activating his web-shooter (try pressing the tip of your middle finger into the centre of your palm with all other fingers fully extended; it can't be done unless you're double-jointed...or have spider-powers) In the manner Stan would have us believe it must be triggered; his Spidey could thrill us with unequalled acrobatics and, in the same fight, fall in a heap like a sack of laundry when clobbered. Ditko made it seem natural to us that the web-lines on Spidey's uniform and the webbing under his arms seem to disappear in distance shots (could it have been that Steve just couldn't be bothered drawing all those little lines? Nah!).

Certainly the two classic solo super-hero origin stories predating Spider-Man's are those of Superman and Batman. Each involves the theme of loss and subsequent dedication to a goal. Though the character himself would become a standout for his unique treatment by his creators, Spider-Man's origin tale in many respects follows the classic formula...albeit with a twist or two. Where Superman loses his parents and his entire civilization when the planet Krypton explodes, and subsequently is trained for his life's mission by his earthly foster parents, and where Batman is inspired to combat crime by the deaths of his parents at the hands of a gunman, Spider-Man, as Peter Parker, has already lost his real parents (whose fate is only made known to him years later) as his story begins, and is

fated to lose his surrogate father, Uncle Ben, before learning the lesson that Superman spent his entire childhood and adolescence having drummed into him: that with great power comes great responsibility. This is the central theme of the Spider-Man saga. Superman rarely questions his lot; to misuse or neglect to use his world-beating powers in the service of humanity would be unthinkable to him. Batman is positively driven in his pursuit of the criminal element, but it is even rarer for him to consider any other sort of life than the one he leads. But the major DC heroes recognize their status as larger-than-life figures, almost living legends, to the rest of the world, and regard their battles against evil as a "holy chore". Spider-Man, on the other hand, would dearly love to chuck the whole super-hero trip, but is compelled to use his powers to help others by his own altruism, stemming in large part from his guilt over the death of Uncle Ben which he might have prevented had he acted less selfishly. More than once Parker has tried unsuccessfully to hang up his costume for good, only to be driven back into the fray by forces beyond his ability to resist. Also, in his lighter moods, he recognizes the beneficial role being Spider-Man has played in his life, and that he could never bring himself to forsake that role while he still possessed his powers. Becoming Spider-Man (which entails the one-two punch of his first gaining superpowers, and then having his nose rubbed in the fact that he must use those abilities for a higher goal than his own gain) was what matured Peter Parker; more than any of his costumed compeers, his origin story is that of a rite of passage into adulthood, a coming-of-age of the hero. As such, he cannot stop being Spider-Man without regressing to the adolescent self-centered Parker of younger days. "Web-slinging" has become like a drug to him; as he once observed, "Being Spider-Man is like going out with girls! I can't give it up!".

To continue the comparison with the Man of Steel and the Caped Crusader, Spider-Man possesses "powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men" as does Superman (though his powers are by no means as great), but given his character and limitations, he is, as is Batman, more comfortable battling gangsters and the like on a local level than in a situation where he is called upon to save the world. Although more physically powerful than the Darknight Detective, Spidey even today is a youngster and a novice do-gooder when compared with the vast amount of knowledge and experience upon which the Batman can draw, and thus he remains more nearly Batman's equal than Superman's, and far more at home in the former hero's urban crimebusting milieu. His role as a figure representing youth, as opposed to the patriarchial Superman or the father-figure (mostly with regard to Robin) Batman, is accentuated when one considers that while Superman has passed beyond the need of surrogate parents (and they have been removed from the stage once their pivotal role is played out), and Batman has become himself the parent figure as well as the ultimate loner (despite the presence of a protege, Robin, and aid, Alfred; and a friend and foil, Commissioner Gordon; Batman has never had a real family and thus remains an essentially lonely figure), Spider-Man, as Peter Parker, has lost only one surrogate parent in his growing-up process while retaining the other. And make no mistake, for all the misuses of her character over the years, Aunt May with her longer life experience is still able to teach her nephew a thing or two about living. Taking the name "Spider-Man", while still an adolescent, is a conceit on Peter's part; he still has a lot to learn. And at times only his last remaining "family" can teach him what he needs to know.

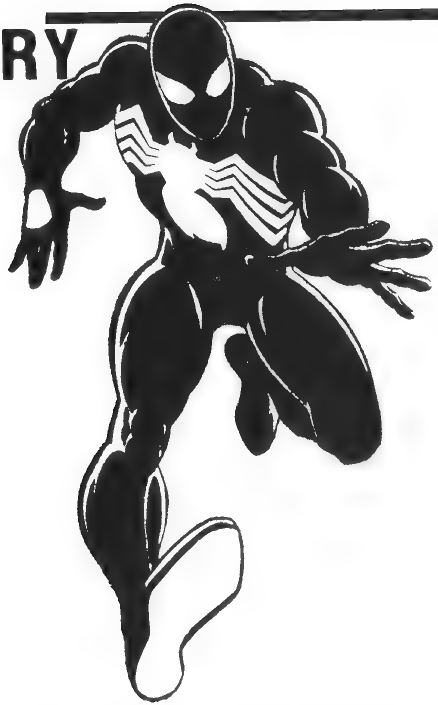
In fact, another outstanding aspect of Spider-Man as a continuing feature, begun in the Lee/Ditko era and continued to the present day, is his cast of supporting characters, a cast so voluminous when compared to that of other super-hero characters' strips as to make Spidey's mag a candidate for an honorary "Super-team" book. At DC Superman would have his tiny clique of close friends among his Daily Planet co-workers and Batman would have his helpmates in crimefighting (while seldom getting beyond casual acquaintance with anybody as Bruce Wayne, since Wayne is far more a cover for Batman than Clark Kent or Peter Parker — each of whom functions as a separate person from the super-identity — ever were for Superman or Spider-Man, respectively). At Marvel, a team strip like the Fantastic Four's needed few supporting cast members (Alicia, the Thing's girlfriend, being the major recurring one), as the quartet of heroes could interact sufficiently amongst themselves, and none of the other Marvel soloists seemed inclined to evolve a circle of friends beyond a single "best buddy" and the obligatory "love interest" (usually an unrequitted one). Spider-Man, however, had a burgeoning group of repertory players in both identities from day one: the aforementioned Aunt May, functioning as well-intended if misinformed (never suspecting Peter's dual role) advisor, substitute family and major raison d'etre for Spidey's keeping his true identity secret; schoolmates Flash Thompson (who initially despised Parker but came to hero-worship Spider—Man) and Liz Allen (originally a derider of "Bookworm Parker" but eventually smitten with him); the blustering J. Jonah Jameson who almost singlehandedly kept Spider-Man, whom he hated, from gaining the popularity with the public enjoyed by the Fantastic Four and Marvel's other more "conventional" super-doers, but who, as publisher of the Daily Bugle newspaper, unwittingly employed his greatest enemy as freelance photographer Peter Parker; Betty Brant, Jonah's secretary, who became Peter's first steady girlfriend and who shared a common background with him (both lost family members to criminal violence and both were forced early into the working world by their loss of parents; ironically, it would be Betty's completely opposite response to her past experiences — she wanted nothing more to do with violence or danger — that would eventually separate the two).

And the supporting cast, like the hero's personal circumstances, was subject to growth and change. As Parker grew older, Aunt May's role was reduced as her par-

ticipation became less necessary; Flash would follow Peter to college as both won scholarships (Thompson for athletics, Parker for scholastic achievement, thus reaffirming their status as foils), while Liz Allen would be left behind after high school graduation; Betty, as noted, would finally lose her status as female lead as the relationship between her and Peter deteriorated and finally ended. Only Jameson would survive virtually intact, and rightly so. Graduation served as a turning point in the series not only by changing the roles of the established characters, and by subtracting Liz, but also by adding some new players: Harry Osborn, who began as a second Flash Thompson and Parker-baiter but later evolved into Peter's first close friend, while being revealed as the son of one of his greatest foes; Gwen Stacy, initially Liz's replacement, who held ambivalent feelings for our hero but became his second great love during the Romita era; and the mysterious Mary Jane Watson, continually mentioned and once almost-but-not-quite seen in the Ditko issues, the niece of Aunt May's best friend, who finally appeared and joined the cast after Ditko's departure. Years later, Parker's college graduation and ascendancy to graduate school would again reorganize the supporting roles in the strip, with Flash, Harry, Mary Jane, Liz (who had since returned), and Flash's later-acquired Vietnamese girlfriend, Sha Shan, joining the by-now-deceased Gwen in semi-limbo, while new peer figures Steve Hopkins, Philip Chang, Marcy Kane, Debra Whitman, et al took over.

No reminiscence of the early days of Spider-Man could be complete without mention of his villains.Here he borrowed a page from DC's **Flash** and **Batman** titles, and rapidly built up a Rogue's Gallery unmatched in comics. That the vast majority of Spidey's most famous foes date from the original Lee/Ditko issues is no accident; each is a unique antagonist, both visually and motivationally. Consider: the Vulture, most charismatic of villains, with the power of winged flight, mainly because he physically resembled a real vulture, even out of costume; Dr. Octopus, Spider-Man's greatest arch-foe, who matches him in scientific expertise and whose namesake, like that of the hero he battles, is an eight-limbed predatory creature; the Sandman, who would go on to equal fame in other Marvel strips to the extent that by the first issue of **Marvel Team-Up**, Spidey would consider the Fantastic Four more the "experts" at battling Sandman than himself; The Lizard, first and best of Spidey's "Jekyll/Hyde" foes, who would return in his human identity of Dr. Curt Conners as almost the only dependable friend Spider-Man would have in his costumed identity; Electro, destined to emulate Dr. Octopus's idea of a league of villains against Spider-Man (as seen in the first **Spider-man Annual**) against his own second super-foe, Daredevil (in the first **Daredevil Annual**); the Enforcers, perhaps the ultimate gangland foes of Spidey, who served such bosses as the Big Man, the Green Goblin, and the Sandman in their collective career; the Big Man himself, organizer of the Enforcers, later to return as Bugle reporter Frederick Foswell, the police informer called "Patch", and one of the first Spider-players to die; Mysterio, the first to convincingly duplicate the web-spinner's powers and frame him through impersonation; Kraven the Hunter, who would return again and again to challenge Spidey to the "most dangerous game" of all; the Scorpion, deliberately created by Jonah Jameson to be Spidey's opposite number and more powerful; the Molten Man, whose appearance on the cover issue 28 caused an overnight sensation. And, of course, the evildoer who came to share the status of Doc Ock (as Spidey dubbed him) as Spider-Man Villain Number One: the Green Goblin, whose identity the readers were challenged to guess even before Lee and Ditko had introduced any of the suspects into the storyline.

A HISTORY



It was the dawn of the Marvel Age and the birth of the one character who would come to symbolize Marvel Comics more than any other.

If one had to pick the quintessential hero of the Sixties, it would be Spider-Man. Peter Parker, with his turbulent personal life, naked introspection and constant self-doubts, epitomized

what the nation as a whole went through during the decade. The fact that this approach to the character predated the youthful turmoil that soon followed meant that the young readers of the comic had found someone who reflected their own anxieties. Parker put into words what many of those readers could not articulate—the uneasiness of growing up and attempting to grapple with often cruel realities.

While the hero/villain was by no means new, Spider-Man was a different breed. Whereas characters like the Spider and the Green Hornet were sought by the police even while they battled crime, those heroes never agonized over that cruel dichotomy the way Spider-Man did. They never tried to turn the public's perception of them around (to no avail) the way Spider-Man did. They went about their business, while Spidey cursed an unfair and remorseless fate.

Though created by Stan Lee, there were several other hands that helped shape him and made him unique in the Marvel stable of heroes.

Even while Marvel was introducing their unique brand of super-hero to the comic book scene, they were still publishing many of the same kinds of books they had been producing for years. Namely weird fantasy comics. These included **Journey into Mystery, Tales to Astonish, Tales of Suspense** and a recent addition to the lineup, **Amazing Adult Fantasy**. The earliest issues of this short-lived title had included a pre-Doctor Strange fantasy hero named Dr. Droom (retitled Dr. Druid in reprint form 15 years later). But for the most part it featured weird adventure stories by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. In fact, within a short time, Ditko was drawing all of the stories and to fine effect. Late in its short life the title was changed from **Amazing Adult Fantasy** to **Amazing Fantasy**. The **Twilight Zone**-style morality tale was still emphasized, though. But then, no one could communicate pathos better than Steve Ditko. The fifteenth and final issue of this title introduced Spider-Man.

The Jack Kirby cover is probably one of the most recognizable in comics and homage was paid to it on **Spider-Man #252** when the all-black Spidey uniform made its premiere.

SPIDER BITE! In **Origins of Marvel Comics**, Stan Lee recalled the creation of this soon to be star of the Marvel universe. "For quite a while I'd been toying with the idea of doing a strip that would violate all the conventions—break all the rules. A strip that would actually feature a teenager as the star, instead of making him an (ugh!) adult hero's sidekick. A strip in which the main character would lose out as often as he'd win—in fact more often. A strip in which nothing would progress according to formula—the situations, the cast of characters and their relationship to each other would all be unusual and unexpected. Yep, I knew what I wanted all right, but where would I ever get a chance to try it? Where—except in a magazine that we were planning to kill anyway?

"What about the name?" Lee continued. "Why Spider-Man? Simple. In the long-dead, practically Paleolithic era when I had been on the verge of approaching teenagerhood, one of my favorite pulp magazine heroes was a stalwart named The Spider. He wore a slouch hat and a finger ring with the image of an arachnid—a ring which, when he punched a foe fearlessly in the face, would leave its mark—an impression of a spider. It was The Spider's calling card, and it sent goose pimples up and down my ten-year old spine. More than that, I can still remember how the magazine's subtitle grabbed me. It was called **The Spider** but after his name were the never-to-be-forgotten words: **Master of Men.** Just to play with that for a moment—roll it around on your tongue, savor the fateful, fascinating flavor—**The Spider, Master of Men.** My mind was made up, the stage was set, the cards had been dealt. I was no more than a puppet in the shadow show of destiny."

Lee discussed the idea with his publisher, Martin Goodman, but Goodman pointed out that most people didn't like spiders. Lee explained how he'd loved the old **Spider** pulp magazine in his youth and hoped to infuse the strip with the same sort of reader enthusiasm.

Lee approached Jack Kirby to do the strip. That was only proper as Kirby was a natural for super-heroes and had already been carrying off the Fantastic Four and The Hulk quite successfully. Lee explained that he wanted Spider-Man to look less heroic, like a normal person wearing a costume, not the handsome or graceful square-jawed hero he was accustomed to doing. Kirby took the assignment, but Lee was unhappy with the initial pages. Kirby just could not deglamorize the concept enough. So while Kirby had designed the costume (and thus the cover as well), the strip was then turned over to Steve Ditko.

Ditko had not exactly been known for superheroes up to this point. In fact from his first work in comics in 1955 up to doing Spider-Man in 1963, he had almost exclusively drawn mystery and science fiction stories. Superheroes are something else again. But then Lee didn't want this to be a standard hero by any stretch of the imagination. What Ditko gave him was pure magic.

"After Spidey's premiere appearance in **Amazing Fantasy #15**," Lee recalled, "the book was dropped and we all forgot about it. I'd gotten the Spider-Man character out of my system and could now go back to our other superstars."

THE AMAZING SPIDER-STAR But then the sales reports came in. The book had been a best seller, and Spider-Man had to be the reason. Lee met with Martin Goodman and the character was given a rebirth in its own magazine.

The things which Ditko did with this title alienated some people then, and apparently a lot of newer fans now (the Ditko reprints of those classics are not met with enthusiasm by the modern young collector. This isn't the Spider-Man they know. It's too different. It looks "old." The art is ugly. Why isn't it by John Byrne? Most of the newer fans probably didn't even realize that **Spider-Man Annual #1**8 is in pacing and layout identical in approach to a Ditko Spider-Man. Even the art is a clear homage to Ditko, albeit with the slick sheen the Eighties fan comes to expect in a Marvel comic.)

What Ditko did was draw Spider-Man so that it wasn't larger than life. In fact it often seemed uncomfortably close to life. New York was never gloomier or grittier than when drawn by Ditko, but for anyone who knows New York, that's what its like. These characters lived in a real world. Each panel didn't glitter with some slick new look such as Kirby gave his books. But then this was only right. The Fantastic Four were wealthy. Peter Parker lived with his aunt.

In the origin story and in the early issues of the magazine, Peter Parker was an ordinary looking high school student. He was a bookworm with geeky glasses. But by page three he'd been bitten by a radioactive spider and in no time flat he'd made his own costume and even invented his web-shooters and web fluid. In 11 pages he'd achieved fame but lost his Uncle Ben to a hood he could have stopped if his sudden fame hadn't made him too arrogant to want to bother. Thus was born a hero driven by a guilt he could never expunge. His uncle would not have died had he acted when he had the chance. (The element came full circle in **Spider Man #200** when the burglar finally died, frightened into a heart attack by his fear of Spider-man).

While there are many true-blue fans who go back and reread the first 38 issues and the first two annuals with great fondness, I daresay that most of today's readers of **Spider-Man** find little to relate to in those Steve Ditko issues. This is because Ditko was a different kind of artist to have picked for this book,

and he delivered something unique. Look at **Spider-Man** today. It is virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the comics on the newsstand. This is because Spider-Man is successful and one doesn't mess with success. So when Steve Ditko left the book he was replaced by John Romita, who is not exactly mister originality in his approach to art. He is a slick, competent but unexciting craftsman and the book has been drawn by many of those over the intervening years. But that's not what established Spider-Man.

Steve Ditko's art (as well as his plotting and a lot of uncredited writing) drew us into the world of Peter Parker and the rest. Its earthy, straightforward approach, along with the stories, made it a strip much easier to identify with than any other being done. Other comics may have been flashier and prettier, but Spider-Man was more real.

OVER THE EDGE With the first issue of his regular magazine, Marvel made Spider-Man something apart. Lee succeeded in making Spider-Man someone who tried to do his best, only to see things turn out wrong. J. Jonah Jameson immediately branded Spider-Man a menace when all he was doing was appearing as a performer, thus ruining his income. When Spidey saved Jonah's astronaut son, he was branded a criminal who had staged the whole incident. When he fought the Chameleon, who had committed a crime disguised as Spider-Man, he found himself having to escape the police when they believed him to be the Chameleon as well. At the conclusion of the story we see a young man who had failed and who was at the bottom of the heap even though he had powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. He'd even spent the whole issue trying to earn money to help his aunt pay their rent, but without a single success. We were left wondering what kind of a hero Spider-man was going to be if he was hounded, branded a menace and driven by desperation. Parker had already imagined the possibilities open to him should he turn his powers to crime. When had a hero even entertained the possibility before? The future was wide open.

While today there have been hundreds of Spider-Man stories exploring and re-exploring all of the plots possible with the character, at the time there were no limits. We couldn't read a story and say, "Well, this is only the third time he's done this. Ho hum. . ." Each issue had an atmosphere of exploration and discovery. Would Spider-Man be pushed over the edge? Wouldn't we in the same circumstances? While readers may have imagined themselves as the Human Torch or The Flash, Peter Parker's life was uncomfortably close to home; his worries uncomfortably close to ours.

Even then some fans found Ditko's art crude because when had they ever seen a "realistic" super-hero strip? The characters weren't all handsome and the locales weren't all sleek like a Carmine Infantino city. It looked like the places we lived and the people we knew. The comic was definitely like nothing we'd ever seen before.

With the second issue the continuing adventures started being brought more into focus. Despite the brooding, threatening ending of the first issue, here he came up with his job idea—selling photos to Jameson. He sold enough photos of the Vulture to pay his aunt's rent for a year with money left over.

As with the first issue, this one featured two stories. The first introduced the Vulture in a clever and interesting story. The only drawback is that, like Mr. Fantastic, Peter Parker cobbled together an electronic doohicky to defeat the garishly garbed felon while knowing nothing about how the Vulture flew. I guess with some people a deduction can go a long way.

The second story in the issue was a cross between a super-hero story and something you'd expect to find in the old **Tales to Astonish**. Spidey stumbles onto a nest of aliens (and I don't mean the Latino variety) and foils their invasion plans. Even the conclusion is in keeping with the old bizarre twist at the end bit. And drawn by Ditko it was even more effective.

Issue three introduced probably the most popular Marvel villain next to Dr. Doom—Doctor Octopus! This first booklength story of Spidey has some of the most dynamic graphics Ditko has ever done. Much is done with contrasting lights and shadows whenever Dr. Octopus is seen. Even in black and white this story is extremely effective and is one of those books which demonstrates the power of comic book storytelling when handled by a master. Another strength of this and other early issues is the use of captions only when necessary. Instead of cluttering up a page with overly wordy captions such as most comics do today, this issue shows the strength of using only the amount of words necessary. This lack of captions is all important to the strength and pacing of the story.

AMAZING ADVENTURE These early issues showed Marvel Comics at the height of its creative form. In issue #4 he met the Sandman, an oddball villain if there ever was one and, like the Hulk, the product of a man getting caught in an atomic blast.

In issue #5 he faced Dr. Doom, in a story which was a sequel to **Fantastic Four** no. 17. The FF even make an appearence at the end. **Spider-Man** went monthly with no. 4 and for a few issues Ditko's art wasn't as slick as it was on the first three issues, as though he couldn't spend as much time inking it. But it was still fine work.

One reason the newer, younger fans of Spider-Man can't warm up to these classic issues is that, other than Aunt May and Jameson, the supporting cast is almost entirely different. Peter is in High School and Flash Thompson, the ultimate jock, is the bane of his existence. Plus Peter is always having misunderstandings with Liz, a girl he likes, as well as pining away for Betty Brant, an "older Woman" and Jameson's secretary. All of these characters and relationships were resolved over 15 years ago in the comic book, before most of the current readers were even born. So while some new fans can't warm up to Steve Ditko's art, the stories are probably just as much the reason that **Marvel Tales** actually sells better when it reprints more recent issues of **Spider-Man**.

While most of Spidey's adventures take place in New York (which must have been declared a disaster area years ago because of all the super-villians who lay waste to sections of it periodically), issue #6 sent Peter Parker on assignment to Florida where he could investigate the mysterious being called The Lizard. This is the type of story Marvel did quite well back then, wherein the villain is not responsible for his actions. Curt Conners, in trying to grow a new arm, instead becomes a human lizard when his formula derived from reptile enzymes backfires on him. This time instead of a gizmo, Spidey whips up a concoction which returns Conners to normal. The Lizard has returned over the years but never as poignantly portrayed as he was in the original appearance when we saw him slowly losing his humanity and reacting to his family. The story is somewhat reminescent of the old film **The Alligator People**.

Number seven featured the return of the Vulture, but it was issue eight where obvious changes began. Peter Parker had gradually started looking less geeky and more handsome over the months. On page two of the story when his glasses are broken, he's clearly not the same ugly guy we saw in the origin story. I guess getting bitten by radioactive spiders clears up vision problems as well as your complexion.

The second story in #8 (the last time they'd do this during the Ditko years), showed us what Spider-Man might have looked like had Kirby been the book's artist. It's just a plotless little exercise in which Spidey meets the FF again. Although inked by

Ditko, Spidey's eyepieces on the mask are very small, and while the art is very good, Spider-Man just doesn't move with the same grace that Ditko infused him with. Also, Kirby's people tend to all look very similar (and very handsome) whereas Ditko can really draw some unusual and very dissimilar looking characters when he puts his mind to it. And he really put his mind to it in his Spider-Man days. You couldn't mistake one person for another in Ditko's Spider-Man!

One oddity about these early issues is that the color of Spider-Man's costume kept changing. One issue it would be blue and red and the next it would be purple and red. I always found the purple, and a deep purple it was, a more interesting combination with the red, webbed portion.

CLASSIC WEB RIDES The Ditko years introduced characters and stories which would shape the future of the title. Issue fourteen introduced The Green Goblin without giving us an origin or secret identity. This did not come for a long time. There wasn't even a good suspect. Issues 17-19 were the first time, and the most effective, that Peter Parker quit being Spider-Man. What made this work so well is that the uncredited writing by Ditko captured a much truer sense of despair and alienation than Lee did by himself. The turbulent feelings expressed by the characters seemed much truer to life than the same things attempted by Lee alone beginning in **Spider-Man** 39.

By **Spider-Man 37**, Ditko's art had tightened up and smoothed out again so that the inking looked much more slick than it had back around issue 7. This is the issue which introduced the Scorpion, who made an interesting reappearance in **Spider-Man Annual 18**. The Scorpion marked the first, but not the last, time Jameson paid to have something created that would defeat Spider-Man. In doing so, he unleashed a worse menace. In issue 25 he paid to have a robot programmed to chase and capture the hero, and it worked. Issue 28, which sports one of the most effective covers in the series, introduced the Molten Man and featured Peter Parker's high school graduation. Real changes took place in the series after this including the fading away of personalities who had been major supporting characters up to that time, such as Liz Allen and Flash Thompson. High school was over, and as is the case with such things, people tended to go their separate ways.

In issues 31-33 we saw what is probably the best continued story the series has presented. While Aunt May getting sick was already a recurring motif by this time, it was handled most skillfuly in this story, especially when Spider-Man has to take on Dr. Octopus and his gang to get the serum that will save her. These three issues contain the quintessential elements which made Spider-Man and Marvel what it was in the Sixties.

The first two Spider-Man annuals (in 1964 & 1965) featured stories which really pulled out all the stops. In the first annual Spider-Man took on virtually all of his major foes up to that time in a real feast of Ditko excellence. It also introduced the bizarre subplot of Aunt May liking Dr. Octopus and thinking him a wonderful gentleman. The second annual guest-starred Ditko's other masterfully wrought character, Dr. Strange. For sheer excellence, these specials would not be approached for many years to come.

The last Ditko **Spider-Man** was number 38. His final issues were relatively average fare, as though Ditko was just marking time.

A NEW ERA In number 39 the Green Goblin returned, captured Spider-Man and unmasked him in a story so good we were not supposed to notice that Ditko was gone. Instead, it only made us wonder how special it would have looked had Ditko drawn it instead of John Romita. Romita did a credible job on Spider-Man for a few issues, but then the book started looking rushed and not as carefully thought out. Plus the stories lacked the depth they'd had under Ditko, which was the real revelation of how much he had contributed to the series.

It seems that nearly everyone has drawn Spider-Man over the years since Ditko left. One of the best jobs was by Gil Kane, who brings a special atmosphere to any book he draws.

Marvel has always tried to celebrate special issues with special stories. In number 50, Spider-Man quit and hung up his costume again. In issue 100 they came up with the especially silly notion of having him grow four extra arms (this grotesque idea, mercifully, only lasted three issues).

Spider-Man, of course, has become a virtual industry unto himself, what with the magazines **Amazing Spider-Man, Marvel Tales, Web of Spider-Man** and **Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man** appearing every month. He is to Marvel what Superman is to DC. He's everywhere. The overexposure, while bringing more opportunities for good writers to depict the character, has diluted his quality.

Some recent annuals have been good, though. Annual 13 featuring Dr. Octopus, was written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by John Byrne and Terry Austin. Annuals 14 & 15 were both by Frank Miller. While Byrne drew Spider-Man his own way (which was fine), Miller brought a touch of Ditko to his layouts and designs. Annual 14 guest-starred Dr. Strange. Annual 18 went even further in capturing the Ditko flair, even to often using the nine-panel pages which many of Ditko's **Spider-Man** employed. The art is a cross between Ditko-style touches and the slick look of most modern comics.

Nostalgia has been a popular springboard for Spider-Man stories. In **What If?** 46, ("What if Spider-Man's Uncle Ben had Lived?"), the art drips with atmospheric Ditko *homages*. It captures the feel of of the Sixties Spider-Man quite well for that, written by Peter Gillis and drawn by Ron Frenz and Sam DeLaRosa. Another one, much shorter but just as good from every angle, appeared in **Spider-Man 248**, "The Kid Who Collects Spider-Man!" Drawn by Frenz and Terry Austin and written by Roger Stern, it's a touching and blatantly manipulative story. Yet, after reading it, you wish it was longer (and that it really happened).

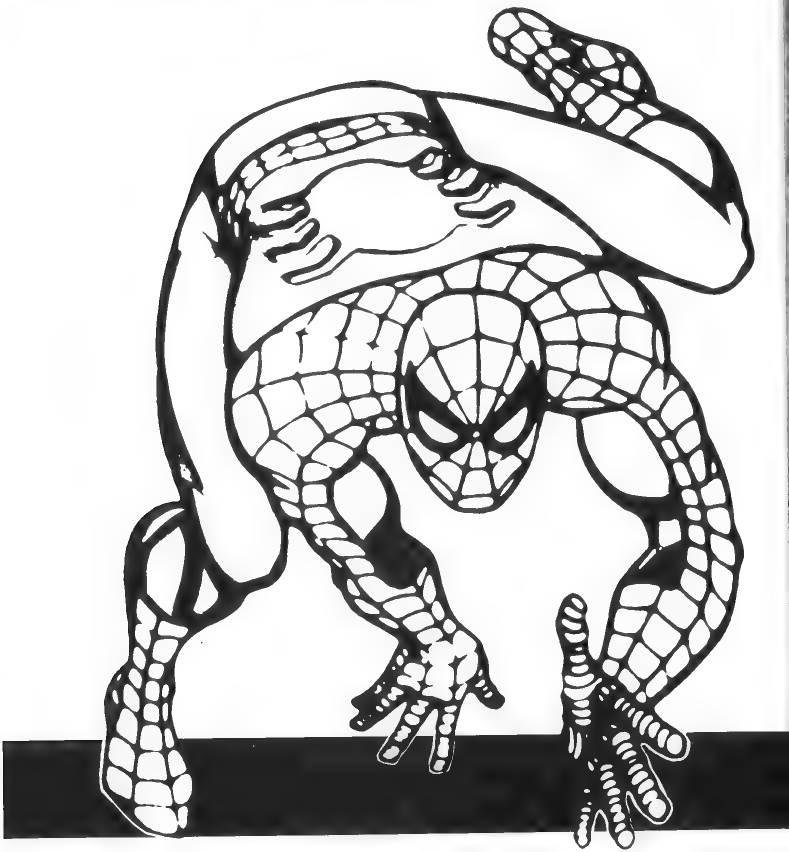
Frank Miller did his usual fine job on Spider-Man once again in **Marvel Team-Up 100**, which co-starred the Fantastic Four. The story by Miller and Chris Claremont is unusually good and the art is wonderful, especially the splash page which instantly hurls us older fans back 20 years because it looks like pure Ditko. No one has left a mark on the character the way Ditko has.

The biggest news involving Spider-Man recently was of course his new, all-black costume which premiered in number 252 (although its origin wasn't seen until six months later in **Secret Wars 8**).

Spider-Man is so ubiquitous that it's sometimes difficult to decide what to make of him. For instance, the Spider-Man newspaper strip has been running successfully for several years now, but the stories seem set in a completely different universe from the books. When the Kingpin's wife was crippled in the strip and the rotund criminal blamed himself, this aspect never appeared anywhere in Marvel Comics. In fact, a totally different use of the Kingpin's (perfectly healthy) wife was made by Frank Miller in **Daredevil**. The two stories never matched up.

And of course there was a Spider-Man live-action tv show a few years back, as well as two different cartoon shows. He gets around. But it seems that, for all of the different versions of him that there are, there are fans who prefer that one over the others. The best stories seem to happen when the current creative talent, who in most cases were little kids 20 years ago, reach back to the formative period of the comic when raw talent and fresh ideas emerged in each and every issue. That's when the stories catch fire and Spider-Man lives up to his legend.

THE ROMITA'S, FATHER & SON



CF: You are best known for your work on Spider-Man. What work had you done prior to that book? In other words, what is the origin of John Romita Sr.?

SR.: I had fifteen years in comics before Spider-Man. I worked for Stan before it was called Marvel Comics, from 1950 through part of 1957, and then I went to DC.

CF: What type of work were you doing during the '50s?

SR.: In the early '50s, I tried Capt. America for almost a year. It was a short experiment in super-heroes. I did westerns, war, mysteries—they were called "weird" stories; they weren't called horror stories, they were like "twilight zone" episodes and romance for awhile. When I worked for DC, I did romance for about seven or eight years.

CF: Who were you working with at DC then?

SR.: It was mostly with female editors. I worked with Phyllis Reed for about three or four years and then, for a while, I worked with a guy named Jack Miller. That's about the time I left to come back to Stan.

INTERVIEW

ROMITA
'82

CF: What year was that?
SR.: In '65.
CF: What brought you back to Marvel?
SR.: A combination of things. The DC inventory had grown, and for some reason, I wasn't sought after by the adventure department. They thought of me as a romance artist. I asked around and the adventure department didn't have anything so I came over to Stan. I gave him a call and he said to come on over, and that same day I was given a book to do.
CF: What assignment was that?
SR.: I started on a Don Heck Avengers job. I inked it. In fact, I was looking for just inking, to relax and not kill myself. After that first Avengers job, I pencilled a Daredevil. It was Daredevil #12 with Jack Kirby layouts, and I finished it. The first two stories were from Jack Kirby layouts.
CF: What was the first book that you actually laid out by yourself?
SR.: I guess it was #14; I think I did it from scratch.
CF: What was your first involvement with the Spider-Man character?
SR.: About six months after I started Daredevil, Stan called me into his office and gave me a stack of Spider-Man books. He said that this was about three years of Spider-Man. First, he had me do a two-part Daredevil with Spider-Man as his guest star to see if I could handle the character. He called me in and told me he wanted me to get familiar with the character in case I would have to do it in a pinch. You see, he and Ditko were disagreeing on a couple of things and it sounded as though Ditko wasn't going to stay. A couple of months later, I was doing Spider-Man. I guess he liked the two Daredevil jobs.
CF: When you took over the character, it was fairly well established. Would you have preferred a less developed character—someone you could have more input into?
SR.: Strangely, I had never heard of it. Even though we used to talk about Marvel at DC, we used to have discussions, I never really saw Spider-Man until Stan showed me that book. Even when I was here for six months, I hadn't seen a Spider-Man book. When he showed them to me, I was surprised and he said, "Would you be further surprised if I told you that was our second best selling book?" I said I was shocked. It was a different kind of style then I had ever seen. I was trying to use the same general approach, thin line, and the same kind of layouts because Stan wanted it. He loved the storytelling and the way Ditko approached it. For the first year, maybe longer, he really didn't like everything I was doing. He didn't like the way I did the Peter Parker character. He kept asking me, "Can't you do more of this? Can't you do more of that?" I did the best I could and then the fans used to give me trouble. For years it was a big joke. We used to get letters all the time, "He's not Steve Ditko. What's he doing on the character? He doesn't look right." I just figured, what the hell, if Stan wants to pay me for it, I'll do it as long as I'm needed on it. I thought it was a temporary job.
CF: I see. And how long did it last?
SR.: I was on it about six years. All during the time that John Jr. was growing up, he was suffering with Peter Parker. He was asking me not to be so hard on Peter Parker. Give him a break every once in awhile. It's funny, he was already telling stories when he was about fifteen. I mean, we used to discuss the plots. He and his brother would give me "input". Many times I would use their thoughts.
CF: John, was this your first exposure to comic books?
JR.: No, the romance jobs he worked on were my first exposure. I didn't have any idea what he was doing. All I knew was that he was drawing pictures and lettering and was stuck up in the attic for hours.
SR.: They thought I was just a guy who didn't have a job.
JR.: No, no...This did not make him happy.
SR.: I **wasn't** too happy. It was hard work.
JR.: I think my eyes widened—my eyes tripled in size—when I saw that Ka-Zar/Daredevil job [Daredevil #12]. I was fascinated by it; I still have that cover. Since then, it's been fascinating and it still is. I still get a kick out of it.
SR.: It was a lot of fun to see your eyes light up. When I got into super-heroes, suddenly he started paying attention to my work.
CF: Were you active in comics fandom?
JR.: No. I never was. I just looked and I read, and I came up to the office to visit, but it was not anything short of awe. I never really became involved in anything else. I was a fan, but not involved in anything but reading and enjoying.
CF: Your first Spider-Man work, your first Marvel work I should say, was a Spider-Man back-up which your father inked.
JR.: The first popular work I did as far as the character. I did work for the British Department through Marie Severin and Larry Lieber. Same characters but a different format. The Spider-Man thing was the first thing I did that was for the American books.
CF: Were you getting credit for the work you were doing with Marie Severin?
JR.: No, I was, more or less, doing sketches for covers and sketches for second splashes. When they broke the books up into two stories, they needed a second splash and sketches for those. I did an occasional cover, and it wasn't much, so I didn't get credit for it.
SR.: That was a hell of a training ground. Those were excellent. That was one of the best breaks we got, that you were able to do all those characters. You gained a facility with all of them. He was able to do everything. He'd do the splashes. He and a couple of the guys, Bob Budiansky...

JR.: Bob Budiansky was working as an assistant editor. He was doing work for the American Department and the British Department.

SR.: It was a good training ground for all of you.

JR.: It was excellent. I thank Marie Severin for that.

CF: How did you feel when John wanted to go into comics?

SR.: I used to tell him to think of something else. I couldn't believe he even wanted it because he used to see me work through the night and weekends while the family was out having a barbeque—I would work and he knew that.

CF: You were not supportive of John's drawing?

SR.: I tried to talk him out of it because I really thought that was not a good way to make a living. I never got very much money out of it, just long hours. He must have seen that, but he just didn't want to think of anything else. I told him if you want to do it, do it, but I would advise you not to.

JR.: He advised me to become a construction worker.

SR.: I told him to get into a business with fresh air and I even told him to get a pension job; a job with some future. At this time, we didn't have a pension in our business.

CF: Do you now?

SR.: Yeah, now we do.

CF: Most of your work in comics, other than the Iron Man issues, has been on Spider-Man, the Annual being the most recent. Do you find it difficult to work on a book that has your father's imprint on it that strongly?

JR.: Without outside influence, I'm hard on myself because I always want to do what he would have done. When I'm working on the book, I picture a page the way he would have done it. Outside of Spider-Man, if I do anything else, I'll picture it the way John Buscema would have done it. I guess I'm looking at the way he's done all the characters. When I'm doing Spider-Man, I picture my father's way of doing it.

CF: Do you have any other influences other than Buscema and your father?

JR.: I don't think I want any other influences. I think that's pretty good company. I don't think anybody else is necessary.

CF: John, when you were first starting out, who were you looking at?

SR.: In comic books at the time, there were only a few guys...I used to love Kubert's stuff, never knowing that Kubert was practically my age. I always thought of him as an older guy, but I found out he was my age; I couldn't believe it. I was in high school when he was doing work. He was 16. I was looking at Kubert's Hawkman saying I'd love to be as good as that guy someday, and he was my age. I used to love George Tuska's nice free and easy stuff, and then Will Eisner, but Will Eisner was out of comic books when I met him. I always liked Jack Kirby, but I never pictured myself in that vein. I used to picture myself as more the Milton Caniff [Terry and the Pirates] type.

CF: More realistic?

SR.: If I had been on my own, trying to make my own direction rather than ghosting somebody else's work, that's the direction I probably would have gone in.

CF: I see. Was Caniff a big influence on you?

SR.: Caniff was the biggest influence on me. If I had gone into comic strip work, I would have just been a mimic of Caniff.

JR.: I think Frank Robbins shows up, if I'm not mistaken.

SR.: Well, Robbins sprang from Caniff.

CF: How would you evaluate the work you were doing then comparing it to now? What changes do you see? What kind of evolution?

SR.: When I started, an artist would get a script and illustrate it as closely as he could to the descriptions in the script. In 1965, when Stan told me he was not going to give me a script, that I was going to work from a half page plot or even a verbal plot that we would discuss, I thought he was joking because I didn't know where to start, but then I realized even though it was painful [I thought I would never live through the second story], this was the way comics should be done. John saw me suffer through it. I used to ask them to help me. I used to say, "What do you think of this", "What do you think of that", "What should I do here", and they would give me some good tips. He and his brother had a lot of good ideas. I also got the feeling of a young person's attitude on stories through them, and it was a big help. I don't know what would have happened if I had been a bachelor without kids.

JR.: He's joking.

SR.: I'm not so sure. I think it was important to me. Of course, I had Stan, who had a great knack for knowing what young readers like. He was constantly molding me and we would discuss every job in minute detail. How to pace it. I suddenly realized that I was a storyteller, and that the artist had to be a storyteller. The other beautiful thing was that the visual approach makes the stories better. If you get the written approach, the artist is limited by what he reads.

CF: You definitely prefer to work very closely with a writer?

SR.: Yes. Even if he works from a script, I think I would like to have some imput. I'll help work out a plot that I think is visual. I used to joke with Stan, say "I don't see any pictures". If we were talking for 15 or 20 minutes , and nothing was popping into my mind. Then I knew we were on the wrong track. If I **saw** pictures, then that's probably going to make a good story. If it's possible, I'd like to have some input. I'll help work out a plot that I John, don't you?

JR.: No, not as closely...

SR.: ...Because Roger's out of town?

JR.: Well, they send me plots and ask me to add my

own ideas if I want. Most of the time, Roger gets exactly what I imagine is workable. Anything I add is secondary—cute little bits—but, most of the time, the plots they give me...

SR.: Pretty tight...

JR.: They have what they need in there, and without me rocking the boat, I'll give them what they want. I've had some input at times, and I'll be doing that in the future.

CF: When you were on Iron Man, Micheline and Layton had a lot of input on the book. Did you also contribute a lot in terms of plot?

JR.: At almost the same time they knew pretty much what they wanted. And without causing any trouble, I gave them just what they wanted most of the time because Bob, as an artist, knew what was good visually. He added to it, to whatever Dave had, and if there was anything too confusing, if there was anything too crowded, I would tell them. Without any squawks, they would say, okay, what do you want to do?

CF: You enjoyed working with them?

JR.: Oh yes, David Michelinie was one of the better writers, and the same with Roger. I've been lucky. They're good writers and Bob had great ideas.

CF: What other inkers or writers do you like working with?

JR.: Inkers? Well, I haven't had that many different inkers to work with, so without seeming too biased, I'd say working with John Romita Sr. is the most fun I had working on a book. Bob Layton was at the stage that I was at when I started! He was just starting. He had only worked with DC before that, and I thought we were cruder at certain points. I thought we worked together very well because of the character. I don't know if we could have done anything on Spider-Man yet, because we had a different combination of styles than Spider-Man. I remember it worked well for us because of Bob's inking style. As far as writers go, Michelinie and Stern are the only two guys I've worked with, aside from Bill Mantlo and Denny O'Neil for a short time.

CF: Is there anyone you would like to work with specifically?

JR.: Sure. Let's see. Name every inker who's ever worked on a book and I'll say I liked it. Joe Sinnot inked one of the Spider-Man books, and that was a lot of fun because Joe Sinnot had this aura around him because of the Fantastic Four. I don't think our styles fit. I just felt that if I had worked on Fantastic Four, it would have been a lot more fun. I would like to have Klaus ink my stuff, I'd like to have Terry Austin ink my stuff, anybody and everybody. I would love to handle my stuff just to see what would happen. Does that cover everyone?

CF: Yes! Your title is Special Projects Editor and Art Director. What does that entail?

SR.: I'm not editing, I'm Art Director. We discuss all of our projects with Sol Brodsky and Dave Kraft, who is really the script editor. My job is really to try to keep the quality up on the art, on the special projects.

CF: What special projects are coming up?

SR.: We run the gamut. We do industrial comics for individual advertisers. A department store might order a comic book from us. As advertising, it would be inserted into a newspaper for one Sunday, and whatever it is, two million readers get the comic book free. We get a lot of good reaction. We've done about six or seven of those, in various towns. We did two for Dallas, one with the Dallas Cheerleaders as guest stars with Spider-Man.

CF: I'm sure Spidey enjoyed that.

SR.: I hope the general readers get the chance to see some of the custom comics. They've got a lot of nice twists.

CF: The one I remember was a give away in the New York Area, for one of the detergent companies.

SR.: Right.

CF: Yeah, it was a reprint of Spider-Man's origin.

SR.: We did original material for Aim toothpaste. We just did a second one for Aim in conjunction with the American Dental Association. We just put out a book for the American Cancer Society against smoking.

CF: There was also one that came out on family planning, I believe?

SR.: Yeah, the Spider-Man book on family planning; Ross Andru did the art. That was the first of the special projects. We had done things casually in our department before. We did a Fantastic Four, which I think has just gone into print again for a young model builder's club. This book is going to be reprinted again, so it's a Fantastic Four story tailored to the model industry.

CF: Is that a give away or is it sold in a shop?

SR.: I think that's a give away. All of these are. We did one for Acme boots and one for Dingo boots. We did some game books, we did the famous energy book with the Campbell kids and the energy department, which got us a lot of publicity.

CF: There was also an animated short for that. That was shown in a number of movie theaters with Captain America.

SR.: Yes, I never saw that. I wish I had. I'd love to see it.

CF: I've seen it. It's cute, lasts about two minutes.

SR.: We put out all sorts of things. We've done a series of Smurfs in mini-size, which we adapted into regular comics and a treasury. We had our own artists do it under the supervision of the creator, and we're doing a line of children's books and coloring books now for our own Marvel books division.

CF: What about the graphic novels? Do they come under your jurisdiction?

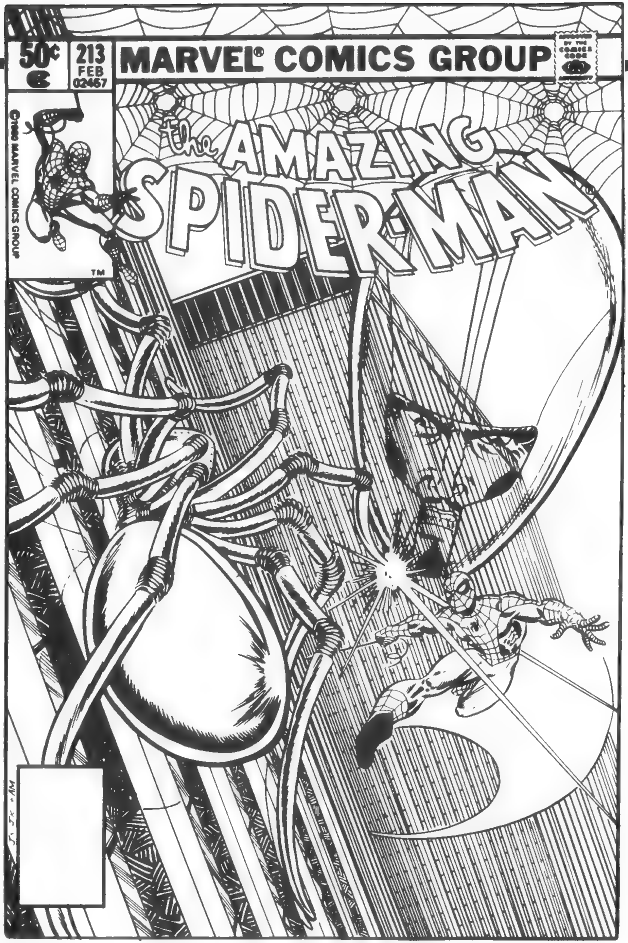
SR.: No. That's Jim Shooter's department.

CF: John, the current work you're doing in comics...do you see any changes coming in what you're doing?

JR.: In the artwork or the stories?

CF: In general.

JR.: No change from what we're doing now. What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we're doing now is a change from what was done before. I don't think they're going to vary from what we're doing now. They want to get back to the old magic that Stan had. I don't think they can do it drastically because I don't know if there's any one thing that can bring it back all of a sudden. They have to touch all of the bases.

CF: I see. Do you feel that there are any changes you'd **like** to see?

JR.: I'd like to see it in my artwork. That hasn't happened fast enough for me. I'm basically a red-neck when it comes to my artwork and my storytelling. I'd like to see a little more power in Spider-Man. He's always done a little bit "tongue-in-cheek", and Roger Stern does that a little bit, and that's good, but I'd like to see more intensity in Spider-Man. He's always had things go wrong for him. I'd like to see him do things right, a little more intensely which means, I guess, to be a little more violent, but nothing bloody and gory. I'd like to see him either get beat soundly once in a while or beat somebody soundly. It's never really definite. The "tongue-in-cheek" stuff is a good combination of things, but I'm a little violent. I'd like to see him do some powerful things. And I want to try to get that in there. Maybe I'll just add it subtly, I don't know.

CF: Would you like to see the comics that you're working on or that people under you are working on, change?

SR.: It goes through a **constant** evolution. It **has** to. There's always a gradual change. When Stan left and had other editors take over, his worst fear was that everyone was just going to rehash the same stuff over and over again. [That's not happened; Shooter has made very sure of that.] There are a lot of DC books that look the same today as they did 15 years ago. They don't change. I don't want to single out anybody, but they don't look that different. Even though they think they're doing different stuff. We're constantly on guard. We make them look like **1982**, so that it doesn't look like it just could've been lifted out of '75 and printed again. When John does a story and Sterno writes a plot; they're constantly thinking '82. The Annual we did, the scenics, the locales, the characterization, they're all geared for 1982. They cannot be mistaken for a 1975 or a 1970 book, which I think is vital. When I was working on the strip with Stan, his worst fear was that it was going to look like reheshed 1970 stuff. Whatever is current, if it's the concorde in the air, as opposed to just another jet, or if it's a modern bus, as opposed to a bus that looks like 1935.

JR.: Another problem is fashion...

SR.: When Gene Colan does a car, you know it's up to date. When other guys do it, it looks like a '35 Chevy. Some guys just don't know how to update cars. What we like to do is have the reader believe what he's reading.

CF: I noticed on the strip that you changed Peter Parker; the hair got a little longer.

SR.: That was Stan.

CF: That was **Stan**?

SR.: He felt everybody's going around with long hair, and why does Peter Parker still look like a square. So we changed it in the strip. We tried to show him with jeans and boots and the girls with current clothing. When I first did it, I didn't think it looked like Peter Parker, but now I've gotten used to it.

CF: Back when you first started with Marvel and you were working with Stan, was he very easy to work with?

SR.: He was very demanding, but he would always exert himself. He didn't just sit back and say, it's not good, do better. He'd go over all the histrionics, all the dramatics, all the sense of the storytelling. He would never settle for anything. If we had a moment's time, he would use it. We were always late in those days and the reason was that Stan was not satisfied. He was the best thing that ever happened to me because for all those years before that, I would just turn in the work and not explore the possibilities.

CF: During the time that you've worked at Marvel, have you seen any major changes in the company and the way things are done?

SR.: Oh, we've had a huge change because we went from a privately owned company, really a small group. When I first joined them in '65, the production department was about four people: Stan, Sol Brodsky, Flo Steinberg, and Marie Severin. That was '65 and in the early '70s, was when we were absorbed by a conglomerate. It was a business change because we became part of a corporation; we don't have the free-wheeling aspects we used to have. Now we have an official business format to follow, and it certainly is different.

CF: Do you miss the old set-up?

SR.: In a lot of ways, I do, but in a lot of ways, we're much better off nowadays.

CF: How old are you?

JR.: I just turned 26, August 7th.

CF: That makes you about the medium age of comic book people.

JR.: I'd like to say I'm still young because I hope I have a lot of time to develop.

CF: I think most people tend to come in during their mid-20's. John Byrne came in when he was about 28.

JR.: I really don't know. I believe so, but there are guys who started, when I started, in their early 20's.

CF: Joe Rubinstein was very, very young. He was about 22.

SR.: Joe was connected with Neal's studio so he was, you know, on the fringes of the business and doing art-work whenever he could help out. That was a great opportunity. The same with John. First, sketches, then fill in pages, then 2 years in our production department. That's something most people don't know.

JR.: Three years; it was three.

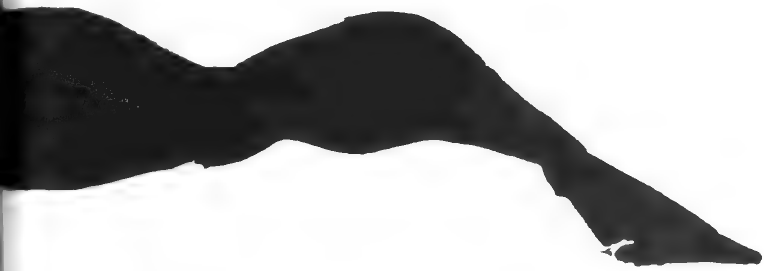
SR.: Three years.

CF: Just doing mechanicals and paste up?
BR.: He was really co-ordinating the Conan book for Roy.
JR.: I was the liason between Roy and the company.
BR.: You also did the cover layouts, the interior corrections...
JR.: Garbage man. That was a lot of fun because I got to work with Roy. When it came into the office, I would touch up and spot, anything. I'd just look at it and absorb it. Tony DeZuniga's inking...I was co-ordinating, I guess is a good word for it.
BR.: You were overseeing the stuff. You would get the pencils, get them back again, get them inked, then do all the corrections that you had time for. It was a big project, Savage Sword...
JR.: Savage Sword of Conan.
BR.: The black and white megazine.
CF: You mentioned Joe Rubinstein before. He inked you on a couple of covers, didn't he?
JR.: Yes, he did. I like his inking. If he had more time to do things, he probably could do more of my stuff, but there's so much to do. So few people and so little time.
CF: Do you see yourself doing any non-comic book work: graphic novels or illustration?
JR.: A graphic novel, I believe, is coming up. I'm looking forward to doing it. I hope I will do it soon. I can say certainly I will be doing one, and I'd like to say that John Romita Sr. will ink it, but who knows what his schedule is.
BR.: That one I'm going to do.
JR.: Okay! So, I'll say John Romita Sr. is going to ink it.
BR.: I would love to do the regular book, but I don't physically think I can do it.
JR.: I don't want him to do anything that's going to take him away from **his** work, and I don't think he wants to do that!
CF: What got you into the studio book that you worked on with Dick Giordano, Frank McLaughlin, and Sal Amendola?
BR.: He just asked me if I would help out with a couple of pages of drawings, and I said sure, if it'll help. I didn't have any idea that I was going to be listed as one of the creators with a picture on the back of the book. A couple of drawings turned out to be a dozen drawings.
JR.: That's your fault. You don't know how to say no to anybody.
BR.: He said he would give me plenty of time. Okay, I've heard a lot of people say that they think the book helps them. I'm very glad...
CF: It does.
BR.: I'm very plesed to be connected with any instruction book that Dick Giordano's involved with. When he told me Dick was going to be doing it, I thought, well, that's good company.
JR.: Maybe I should read that...(laughter) It might help me out.
BR.: It's very basic.

CF: Sal Amendola is using it as a textbook for his perspective class at the school of visual arts.
BR.: That's very interesting. The next book I think is going to be even more extensive. I told him I would help him out with that too because I don't want to change their luck.
CF: Dick places a lot of stock in letting new people into the business through programs that he's started at DC. Do you also find that this is important?
BR.: My attitude on that is that I'd hate to go recruiting people with the prospect of them doing work in the business where there's not room for more than a few new people at a time in the whole industry. When we were looking to form a guild, we only had about three or four hundred people producing comics. They're all still in the business, so there are very few openings. I hate to tell a kid that if he will study this book, he will get into comics because there's a lot of competition out there. I'm reading requests and submissions every day. Hundreds of samples come in. Nobody can promise all those people work.
CF: If you had to sum up your biggest contribution to comics, what would you say?
JR.: Me! No, don't write that...(laughs).
BR.: I think he's right. I always thought of myself as an illustrator hired to illustrate a story. I never set out to influence anybody, and I never set out to make a contribution. I was in this business for a living and I've managed to make a living for 32 years in comics. All I ever wanted out of it was a living wage. If I've contributed anything, it's been just a coincidence.

A TALK WITH SPIDER-WRITERS

David, writer of *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man,* states quite matter-of-factly, "Peter Parker is a character with great dignity. Many people regard him as some sort of schlemiel, but that's hardly the case. He's always chosen his own road and has done so willingly and consciously. When he did not fit in at high school it was because he chose not to. When the other kids were running off to have a good time, Peter chose to study. Parker has always been a loner and as Spider-Man he became a super-powered loner. He doesn't fit in with the Avengers and even looks odd with them. He does not fit in with any team.



INTERVIEW

"The whole thing that makes Peter Parker work is his sense of responsibility. Because of his initial mess-up with his uncle, he feels that he is constrained to act, whenever possible, in a manner for the benefit of other people. Spider-Man regards himself as a protector of innocents and it's something that has carried over all this time.

"There's the old line," David continues, "That with great power comes great responsibility." But responsibility for what? I think that it is to use that power for the greatest good, namely to protect people who do not have such power. One the other hand, he does not necessarily go out looking for trouble. He goes swinging around the city but the reason he's looking for trouble is so that he can photograph it for *The Daily Bugle*. He does not go on patrol. He is not your typical superhero. He's unique."

"You can't get away from the fact that he has his problems, but I think that he became the butt of a lot of crass jokes because of his sense of responsibility," observes DeFalco, scripter of the original Spider-title, **The Amazing Spider-Man**. "He had so many things to do that he didn't have time to hang around with the other kids.

"One of the things I admire most about Peter Parker as a character is that he's just an average guy who perceives himself to be an average guy. Sure he can stick to walls and have the speed and agility of a spider, but aside from that he's pretty normal. In a recent issue he said that he hates wearing anything that makes him stick out in a crowd, and this from someone who wears a red and blue skintight costume with little lines on it. A lot of his confidence comes from putting on the mask. In real life I've seen people putting on the Spider-Man costume and acting a lot less inhibited. The nice thing about Peter Parker is that the character is always wise-craking but they fail to notice that on most of those same occasions, Parker hands out wisecracks, too. When we switched to the black costume, Ron Frenz and I had a discussion because we weren't sure how we should handle him until we realized that whatever color costume he wears he's always the same person. He's a nice guy. He screws up a lot but he tries hard."

Michelinie is the new regular writer on the newest of the Spider-titles, *The Web of Spider-Man*. He is just starting to shape his own little corner of the Spider-World. "Since I'm new to the book, I'm still formulating my opinions on who Peter Parker is. But over the years, I'd say that the character has matured. I think that his personality changes somewhat with each writer. The character deals with each situation as he sees it. Perhaps Dr. Octopus or someone may manage to keep coming back, but that doesn't mean that he's going to get tired of dealing with the menace. He tackles each situation as it comes along."

Presently, plans are underfoot which will affect all of the titles. Even so, they will all retain their own stamp of individuality. That individuality is being brought to *Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man* by writer David. When asked whether there was going to be a subtle difference in approach between his title and the others, he laughed and indicated that the difference wasn't going to be subtle at all!

"The mood of *Peter Parker* is grittier. We're going to be experimenting with storytelling style and subject matter. The basic inspiration for it is that we're trying to give it a *Hill Street Blues* style of material. That's why every issue now ends with a black box with white lettering, just like *Hill Street* does. Every single issue, we'll be hanging by our thumbnails, hoping that the Comics Code lets it go by. We'll have at least one segment that we'll wonder whether the Code will pass.

"We're trying to show things realistically," David emphasizes, "not for shock value. We weren't sure, for instance, that the Code would let us get away with showing a priest getting killed. To those who say that we're showing the violence in a brutal fashion in *Peter Parker*, my response is: No. Violence is brutal—we're just showing it realistically.

A wide variety of topics will be covered in the months to come in this title. These encounters will be unique in Spider-Man's life as well as, in some cases, the entire superhero canon.

"For instance, in issue 110, when Spider-Man gets his hands on the main bad guy, he literally beats the living crap out of him because he's so furious," he reveals. "In about a year, I'm going to bring that character back. His condition is going to reflect the realities of what enduring a beating at the hands of such a super-powered character as Spider-Man would actually be like."

The *Peter Parker* book will have many other unusual storylines.

"In issue 112, we're going to reveal that one of our characters is an unwed mother. Randy Robertson will be returning after a lengthy time. He's going to be married to a white woman. That isn't done much in comics. We have a realistic fight scene in a hospital which shows the implications of what a fight in a hospital would be like. We have a guy dressed up like Santa Claus who's a second story man. He goes to houses and the kids let him in. He takes small portable objects like televisions, telling the kids that he'll be returning on Christmas with big televisions. He tells the kids not to say that he's been

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there, so nobody notices that these weird burglaries are being done. I'm not dead sure that the Code is going to let us do that! The main villain in my first couple of issues is revealed to be a cop. I always have to wonder how much the Code is going to alllow us to get away."

David has very specific goals for his work on the title—namely, he's aiming the comic at people much like himself.

"What we're trying to do is gear *Peter Parker* for the readers my age (28). This does not mean that a reader can't enjoy it. I got a call from an eleven year old who absolutely loves *Peter Parker*. But I am putting in things that a younger reader would not catch — things that are implied; subject matter that we haven't dealt with before. In issue 108 innocent bystanders get hurt by a rifle blast which Spider-Man dodges by instinct. They go down and Spider-Man has to deal with that."

This new approach is the joint decision of editor Owsley and writer David. "He wanted a Spider-Man book with a gritty, realistic feel. I said 'That's funny,, because that's what I would like to do.' To a certain extent I'm trying to get to the grittiness that you see in the old Stan Lee/Steve Ditko Spider-Man stories. I'm trying to go back to the basics while going off in another direction.

"I have a slightly skewed vision of comic books. What I try to do is constantly keep the readers off-guard. Part of the problem with a lot of readers is that when they first started reading comics, a lot of what was done was new to them. That is why people most fondly remember the books they started with. I remember the Sixties books. To me, Ditko's translation of the character is the best. But as readers get older, they start to see a lot of things that are coming. It's hard to surprise them. I'm trying to get that surprise for the long-time reader. I want to have them say: 'Wow, that wasn't at all what I expected!' If the older readers can't see it coming, the younger readers certainly won't. In issue 109, I reveal the secret identity of my main villain. To my knowledge, only three people figured it out ahead of time. I want every issue to catch people off guard. The ideal is when they read an issue and then go back and read through it again.

"Rich Buckler is doing incredible work on the book. Fortunately both Rich and I have very cinematic views of comic books. We mesh very well. Rich has been turning in phenomenal work. He gives me just what I ask for, which is always nice. I find it a tremendous opportunity because he was the first pro I ever met eight or nine years ago. We're even brining back Deathlok in *Peter Parker*, which is a character near and dear to Rich's heart."

David reveals other plans and plot tidbits from forthcoming issues. Issue 112 will be a Christmas story. It plays off the documeted fact that for people who are young and single, Christmas is a very depressing time of the year and sees a marked increase in suicides. "Peter spends a good chunk of that issue being depressed, but it's not a depressing Christmas story. It has an upbeat, appropriately schmaltzy ending that I couldn't get away with in any other issue."

Issue 113 of *Peter Parker* features the Mauler in a story which he carefully describes by saying, "I think it's going to catch a lot of people off guard."

Issue 114 is titled "Terror in the Old Folks Home" and plays on Spider-Man's new awareness of the danger his battles can pose for innocent non-participants. Says David, "Some characters return from issue 110 and take over Aunt May's boarding house. Because of the innocents killed during an earlier storyline, Spider-Man finds himself wanting to save Aunt May and the other old people, but having to work up the nerve to do so."

Then 115 launches a lengthy subplot with The Black Cat where we learn why Spider-Man has been having such abominable luck lately. "People think that we've just been dumping on him unfairly," David explains, "but in 115 you'll learn that this is not the case." This issue also features Dr. Strange as guest-star.

This leads into 116 which involves The Black Cat and a new villain called The Foreigner. "He's the world's top

assassin," he reveals. "This guy is so good that 37 law enforcement agencies swear that he cannot possibly exist. He is schooled in every form of combat known to man and seven that aren't!" Sabretooth also appears and actually manages to beat himself! "That should be terribly entertaining," hints David.

"Because of events which occur in 116, The Black Cat is hacked off with Spider-Man. She wants to get back at him. The situation is that a guy breaks up with his girlfriend but she knows some embarrassing things about him. Peter Parker has this girlfriend who knows that he likes to dress up in black tights and swing around the city. Rather than just reveal his identity outright, she leaves him to wonder when or if she's going to reveal it. This is much more aggravating for him. During the course of a year, no one is going to know which side The Black Cat is on. She's going to form an alliance with the Foreigner. I really like The Black Cat and I want a lot of people to like her. I think that people are going to be excited by what I'm doing with her."

The stories which David is writing for *Peter Parker* are underscored by his views of the character as he has changed over the years.

"I view Peter Parker as being angry. He's been at this for seven years and he has a very black-and-white definition of the world. There's the good guys and the bad guys. For seven years he's been protecting innocents but they're still getting hurt and killed while crime is not on the decrease. All of the bad guys he collars just wind up back out on the streets again. He became Spider-Man when someone close to him died because he didn't do something he should have. Now he's doing all the things that he should and loved ones still die, like Gwen Stacy, Capt. Stacy, etc. That should become very frustrating.

"Peter Parker is supposed to be everyman," David continues, "and he must reflect the climate that we find in society today, particularly of people who dwell in big cities. They see crime and violence every night on the news and are angry and upset. Since Peter Parker fights crime all the time, it should be personally aggravating for him. That's what I'm trying to put across in *Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man*."

THE WEB OF DAVID MICHELINIE

While Michelinie has written Spider-Man before ("The Twilight Heroes" in *Web of Spider-Man 9, for example*), he's only just joined the book as its regular scripter. He has conceived a storyline which will take Peter Parker out of New York as well as out of the country. Parker becomes a globe-trotting photographer for the resurrected Now magazine (*Now* is revived in issue 16 of *Web*). His first assignment (in issues 17 and 18) will take him to Appalachia but world travels don't begin until issue 20.

"This is going to change the approach to the stories. He'll be out of the country three-quarters of any given year," Michelinie reveals. "Obviously it's going to be a problem having him conveniently running into Dr. Octopus in Brussells and the Scorpion in Tokyo. He's going to be

divorced from his regular rogues gallery of villains as well as his supporting cast. Aunt May won't be globe-trotting with him, nor will Robbie Robertson. The stories will be self-contained with two or three-issue runs of a particular continuity. This doesn't mean that there won't be a regular supporting cast. for instance, J. Jonah Jameson might decide he wants to get back into reporting and go along with Peter for one issue. Mary Jane could have a modeling job in Paris when Peter goes there. But, for the most part, other characters will be introduced and the regular supporting cast will be limited."

Michelinie has written for other Marvel characters including Iron Man and the Avengers. But writing for Spider-Man is a whole new ball game.

"When I was writing *Iron Man*, the only other place he was appearing was in *The Avengers*, which I was also writing. I had total control over the character. With Spider-Man, every month that I write a story, he's also appearing in two other titles. I can't really sit down and say: 'This is what I want to do with Spider-Man!' because there are two other people senior to me in the Spider-Man universe who have things they want to do with the character. I can't just ignore them. I'm trying very hard to at least acknowledge the other stories and not contradict anything.

"The global slant in *Web of Spider-Man* will solve that to an extent. If he's off in Tunisia for a couple of issues, I won't have to worry about the other titles. I will just have to worry about fitting in when he comes back to New York.

"It usually takes me several issues to get comfortable with a series. With Spider-Man, it's going to take longer. Not only am I getting used to coordinating with everyone and getting thrown surprises from right and left, but I'm also writing him differently. When I took on *Web*, I thought that I would be writing the Spider-Man I'm used to. But the

Spider-Man I'm used to lives in New York and goes to see Aunt May and Mary Jane. I can't do that! The Spider-Man in *Web* will only do that once every three or four issues. I don't have a specific plot for this European travel. I'm thinking in terms of setting a story in Ireland simply because the religious wars would be a natural for a reporter and photographer. There is built-in conflict and pathos — children are getting blown up! That's drama. You don't have to embelish it. Just show it for what it is and you've got some powerful stuff. I'm thinking of setting a two or three issue run in Britain and I'm sure that politics will play a part in that."

Since Spider-Man's adventures have largely taken place in the U.S. or in space, the character will be encountering other countries' perceptions of himself for the first time. How would a foreigner view this oddball Yank super character?

"This is something that I'm going to learn as I plot the stories," Michelinie explains. "I haven't sat down and thought, 'Well, how is Spider-Man perceived by the French peasant?' One problem is that if Peter Parker goes to Australia and then Spider-Man happens to be there that week while the next week Peter's in Bangkok and Spider-Man's there, his secret identity will be in jeopardy. Spider-Man is going to learn to keep a low profile in his adventures across the great waters. I'll figure out a lot of that when I get to it."

This dilemma opens up a wide array of possibilities. Will Spider-Man operate under other identities? Will he adopt the guise of an already existing superhero? Michelinie has a variety of ideas, but Peter Parker pulling on a different, highly recognizeable costume is probably not among them.

"I don't think that he would disguise himself as Captain America or Daredevil without talking to them first. When I was at the San Diego Comicon last year, a dealer from Chicago said that there was someone coming into his store saying that they were me. They were even signing autographs! I freaked! Apparently this guy was a pleasant fellow. But that there was someone else saying they were me made me feel really strange. I don't think that Spider-Man would take on someone else's identity without them okaying it first," Michelinie continues.

"The plot that I'm doing now doesn't have him appear in costume except in a brief flashback."

Which brings us to a shocking change involving Spider-Man's costume!

"As of *Web* 17," he reveals, "the red and blue costume is destroyed; the black costume will become the only costume used. The red and blue costume will not exist. This is not to say that there couldn't be another one a year or two down the pike. But in the forseeable future, the black costume will be the only Spider-Man costume. This will occur about April '86."

In order to pull this off, Michelinie had to coordinate things through his editor, Jim Owsley, and the other Spider-writers: Tom DeFalco and Peter David. This is due to a very special cliffhanger ending which he wrote for *Web* 17. But more on this later. As of this early date, Michelinie

is still formulating plans for *Web of Spider-Man*.

"As far as guest-stars go, I don't have any plans other than for a villain or two. I'm still working into this globe-trotting storyline. I'm sure that when I get more comfortable with that I'll try to find Marvel characters who are located throughout the world. I will use them to anchor *Web* a bit more solidly within the Marvel universe and less strongly with the backdrop of Manhattan. I was thinking of putting The Mauler into the Ireland story because he's Irish but I found out that Peter David is using him in *Peter Parker* 113. That might be too close to when I would be using the villain. We don't want to use the guy every six months."

While every Spider-Writer works with one eye firmly fixed on the constantly moving Spider-Man universe, there is one version fo Spidey which no one is supposed to worry about — the daily newspaper strip.

"I don't take it into my considerations at all. The newspaper strip hasn't been mentioned to me in the five months I've been on *Web*," Michelinie explains, "so I assume that it's off on its own."

Micheline reveals that *Spider-Man* graphic novels are in the works. "There are several. There is one by Berni Wrightson which I believe was written and drawn and should be out sometime this year. There's one that Bob Layton has gotten approval on doing. And at least a third one."

He says that there are no further tie-ins with *Secret Wars* scheduled for *Web*. "There are tie-ins in both *Peter Parker* and *Amazing Spider-Man*. The one in *Amazing* will lead into the conclusion of *Secret Wars II*. But none of that is happening in *Web*."

THE AMAZING TOM DEFALCO

Of the three books, *The Amazing Spider-Man* sticks the closest to those stories identified with the character as he has been for many years. While the darker side of the superhero mythos is being uncovered in *Peter Parker* and Spider-Man is off to see the seven wonders of the world in *Web*, *Amazing* is different. In issue 271 he encountered a character who hadn't appeared in the book since *Amazing Fantasy* 15, the wrestler that Peter Parker defeated in his earliest super-powered days. But while many readers regard the old Peter Parker as a hapless soul, DeFalco, like Peter David, is quick to challenge that view.

"I think that when one refers to Spider-Man in the beginning as being hapless, you're just looking at the surface details of the character. I look at Peter Parker as a man with an enormous sense of responsibility. I don't see him as a loser. He sees himself as a loser, but I see him as a man who allows his responsibility to overwhelm his personal satisfaction. Peter Parker can't go out with a pretty girl because his aunt is sick and he needs money and Dr. Octopus is in the city again. Even though he'd rather go out on a date with a pretty girl, he has a responsibility to stop Dr. Octopus. At the end of the story, when he has stopped Dr.

Octopus and saved the city, he perceives himself as a loser because he didn't get the girl. This is backwards because he's saved all of us!

"There is a nice historical tradition that goes back to the beginning of literature — that heroes tend to be self-sacrificing and that's why we admire them. If it's a choice between going out and getting my head kicked in by Dr. Octopus and taking Mary Jane Watson out to dinner, I have no interest in risking my life. That's what makes Peter Parker a hero and Tom DeFalco an average person."

DeFalco also takes exception to the perception that Peter Parker has always had problems getting a girlfriend.

"Girls always found him attractive. If you check back in the early issues, there was Liz Allen and Betty Brant and they were constantly struggling for Peter. Things never quite worked out for him but he always had those two girls. And then Mary Jane Watson came on the scene. He had his pick! It never worked out for him because he had so many other things to take care of."

The stories in *Amazing Spider-Man* are intended to feature the traditional cast of characters and villains, but still overlap the tales in *Web* and *Peter Parker*. With Kathryn Cusing as the new city editor of *The Daily Bugle* (replacing Robbie Robertson), Peter Parker has to compete more heavily with other news photogs. What isn't generally realized is that Parker isn't a particularly terrific photographer; he just manages to get the best pics of Spider-Man; shots of headline-making conflicts that no other photographer is able to catch.

"We're going to be a little open-minded about his career," he reveals. As to whether this might lead Parker to marriage one day, Tom states simply, "It's possible. We can change anything."

In describing how he sees the Peter Parker of the Eighties, Tom states, "There's a lot of internal conflicts in this character and a lot of questioning of who he is and why he's doing this. There's a big difference, though, between growing and maturing and changing. Certainly I'm not the same person that I was 20 years ago. Hopefully I'm a far more mature version of the same individual."

WHEN SPIDER-WRITERS GATHER

In order to keep the adventures of Spider-Man straight, the editor and the writers of *Amazing, Web* and *Peter Parker* get together for regular conferences.

"We have regular Spider-lunches," DeFalco informs, "which is where the three writers along with Jim Owsley and his assistant, Adam, get together. We discuss current continuity and story ideas for the next two or three months. Then we look and see if there's anything happening in one book which can be played off in a different book."

"As an example," David explains, "Jim Owsley pointed out that at the end of *Web* 17, David Michelinie had done a wonderful cliffhanger ending in which you literally did not know what had happened to Spider-Man. So Jim Owsley

asked Tom and I if we could each do an issue of *Amazing* and *Peter Parker* which didn't have Peter Parker in them. That way he wouldn't apparently be blown away in *Web* and then, a week or so later, he's swinging around town in *Amazing* saying 'Boy, I'm sure glad I got out of that!' In order to heighten it and leave it literally as a cliffhanger, which is difficult for a character who appears almost every week, we played off that ending in the other titles. It was no problem for me because I'm juggling so many subplots that sometimes it's difficult to get Peter Parker into the book. Leaving him out was absolutely no problem. Both *Amazing* and *Peter Parker* will basically print the last page that appears in *Web* 17 as their last page. This brings the whole thing full circle back to *Web* at the beginning of the following month."

The writers receive copies of each other's plots each month.

"I am sent copies of the other plots as soon as they are okayed," Micheline explains, "and copies of my plots are sent to the other writers. As soon as the stories are written and drawn, I get copies of those. I'm pretty much aware of what the other person is doing on a week-to-week basis. I call Tom DeFalco or Peter David on occasion if I'm doing something that might affect their books or might be something that they could enhance in their books.

"We had a big Spider-Meeting back in June with all the writers, pencilers and inkers. We're talking about making that an annual or semi-annual gathering. I get together with the other writers and editors every month or two and compare notes."

"In many of the cases," DeFalco continues, "we argue. Would Peter Parker do this? I'll look at what a writer wants to do and I may feel that it's out of character while they may see something that I want to do that's out of character. We butt heads on a regular basis. Sometimes, out of this, we get better stories and sometimes we don't."

"We have an editor who moderates the discussions and tells us who's right or if anybody's right. At one time, I was the editor of the books and I got to say who Spider-Man was. When I gave that up, Jim Owsley became the editor. There are some things that go on now which, in my view, don't agree with who Spider-Man is. But it's up to the editor to decide. Both the joy and the horror of writing comic books is that you put so much of yourself into the work. You get so emotionally tied to the characters that it is sometimes hard to see someone else handling Spider-Man in a different way."

But are three montly Spider-Man comics too much to handle? David Michelinie tackled that question and observes, "While it's unique, I don't know that it's too much. All three of them are selling quite well so there are certainly enough interested people to support three books. But it does create unique problems, too. If I were editor, I would hire someone and put them on staff just to plot the books and worry about continuity and see that everything works. Than I'd hire three writers to script them from those plots. But I'm not the editor, just one of the writers. So while there are a lot of problems, they're not insurmountable."

As much as Ditko laid the foundation of a great character, it was the team of Stan and Johnny that continued the building of Spider-Man as the best of what Marvel was. Peter Parker was now a college man, more urbane and in the social swing. He had come out of the dark Ditko world and had gone from boy wallflower to man about town! Much of this personality growth is reflected in the clean, appealing art of John Romita, who brought his vast experience as a romance artist to a superhero comic. Peter became more handsome, the girls in the strip became absolutely **beautiful**, and everybody started to dress in the latest fashions. The campus, the disco-teque, the bachelor pad and motorcycle became new symbols in Peter's life, though the tried-and-true encounters with J. Jonah Jameson and Aunt May were continued, fresh as these characters still were in the early years.

The first great series Lee and Romita can lay claim to is the Kingpin/Foswell trilogy in 50-52. Peter had thrown down his mask while beset by more than his usual share of problems; the Kingpin established himself as the head of the mobs in New York; Frederick Foswell, an old Ditko player who had been a criminal and later reformed, found his moral resolve weakening and returned to crime. Spider-Man returns to his chosen task, only to have to save the life of Jameson, the man who has done him more harm than any three super-villains! In the end, though, it is Foswell who performs heroically to save J.J.'s life. Finding that he cannot live on the wrong side of the law, the hapless reporter 'redeems' himself by sacrificing his own life in defense if the man who had given him a chance when he needed it. Though Spidey took more of a supporting role in the denouement, these stories show us more of Jameson, a character Lee enjoys and finds easy to write, introduce us, without much fanfare, to Robbie Robertson, the Bugle's City Editor, who just happens to be black, take some hoary formula stuff (the hero that wants to quit, the bad buy that turns good at the end) nad make it *work*, and show that the team of Lee and Romita could produce some dynamite entertainment!

Amazing Spider-Man 75 was the last really memorable issue produced by Lee/Romita. It was actually part eight of a ten-issue series involving the Kingpin and his wife, an ancient tablet, the Maggia, and Silvermane's acquisition of the formula for eternal youth, which led to a superb climax with the aged Silvermane reverting to childhood and infancy and finally to nothingness as the helpless Spider-Man watches in quiet horror. It was a special moment that was disappointingly followed by several flops and misfires. In quick succession we were witness to a rather unnecessary return of the tragic Lizard (who became less sympathetic and more tedious with each 'comeback') the contrived Prowler, the ludicrous Kangaroo (a second rate parody of a Spidey nemesis), and the Kingpin's son, The Schemer. It was far too soon for the Kingpin to return in any way, shape, or corpulent form. For the first time, it seemed to this veteran fifteen-year-old reader that Stan was running out of ideas, and repeating familiar schticks and regurgitating special villains too often and quickly. Even a young fan has a memory, and certain standards, for his favorite super-hero. Also indicative of this quality downtrend was Romita's less frequent hand in the art. Some issues were looked to be by John Buscema and Jim Mooney. Then Romita would be back. Then Gil Kane took over as main spider-artist, though inked by John. Romita would continually return to full pencils and inks, if only for an issue. Growing disgusted with the artistic musical chairs, I ceased to be a regular buyer of **Amazing Spider-Man** for the first time in five years. Consistency and stability were missing from that comic and would not soon return.

I checked back to see what all the hubbub was about, when in 96-98, Lee bucked the Comics Code authority to run a story wherein Parker's pal Harry Osborn got hooked on **LSD.** I was all for the gesture, but by that time couldn't see it and yet another return by the Green Goblin! How could I know that the worst was yet to come.

Amazing Spider-Man 100 was an anniversary issue that I had looked forward to, previous disgruntlements aside. Sadly, it was a bloody joke, starting with Peter's additional four arms(!), his involvement with Morbius, The Living Vampire, and the latest and worst excuse for the Lizard to return. Spidey had been around for **one hundred** issues, to come to **this**? When Parker, J.J.J., and Gwen Stacy journeyed to the Savage Land in 103-104, I was too stunned and just a little bit too heartbroken to feel any loss. The love affair was over.

I kept looking over the shoulder of my childhood friend and fellow collector. As bad as it had become, he could not yet bring himself to drop **Spider-Man**, his all-time favorite comic. Randy had dropped **Iron Man**, **Daredevil** and **Sub-Mariner** when a young new writer named Gerry Conway had taken over and wrung all the vitality out of those mags. But he persevered with **Spider-Man**, and we hoped against hope that the character would emerge victorious over the writer. Oh yeah?

Some fans will tell you that **Amazing Spider-Man** 121 and 122 are a highpoint in the series, as Peter's true love, Gwen Stacy, is murdered by the Green Goblin in Part One, and the Goblin buys the farm in the concluding tale. I didn't buy the story then and I like it even less now. The deaths had shock value and, probably very good sales at the time, but not much more. Conway exploited the reader with a cheap melodramatic ploy ... when all else fails, kill somebody off. It was like a bad detective novel...before you grow bored, turn the page and find another corpse under the bed. I felt cheated and used by a hack writer who could fill up page after comic page with situation and dialog but was impoverished when it came to original ideas. The only thing worse than Stan Lee repeating himself was Conway repeating Stan's worst efforts. This was the nadir of **Spider-Man's** long run, and unfortunately, it was just a sign of what the rest of the decade would bring.

It was the era of Marvel expansion, when their lineup of titles went from a dozen to several score, without the requisite addition of capable talent. **Spider-Man** and **Fantastic Four** became like **Mad Magazine** parodies of what these titles had been and meant in the 1960s. Conway continued as Spidey scripter until 149, leaving on a sour note by dropping the awful clone plotline in the hands of Archie Goodwin, who did his best to wrap things up in 150 and then get the hell out of there! Len Wein stepped in to match Gerry's long tenure on the book and actually tried to outdo Conway by substituting multiple Green Goblins for clones in the final Wein opus (176-180). Six miserable years of turgid tedium was over.

One bright spot during this period was the regularity of penciller RossAndru. I didn't always like his rendition of Peter Parker and other supporting players, but his storytelling abilities were top-notch. His visions of Spidey in action over the New York skyline made for some of the best action sequences in Spider-Man's history. The strong, stable artistry of Andru would be sorely missed from this title, from when Ross left in 1978 until when John Romita, Jr. became more-or-less the "official" **Spider-Man** artist in the last year.

Marv Wolfman seemed to be the first writer in years to want to get Spidey back on the quality track. He tried to team up with one artist for the most part, and with Keith Pollard, the veteran Marvel writer brought some genuine interest to a tired, abused character who was on his last spidery legs. Although I felt cheated by the fake death of Aunt May and the excesses of J.J. Jameson's mental condition, overall Wolfman and Pollard built up to a truly worthwhile anniversary issue, 200, which really returned Peter Parker to his roots and his powerfully simple **raison d'etre**..."this was the anniversary issue that 100 never was."

Just when it seemed that Wolfman was the right guy to return Spider-Man to his former glory, Marv became the latest in a long line of Marvel scripters to depart for the now greener pastures of an enlightened DC. Marvel's flagship title began to flounder under a dizzying array of writing styles and amateur artwork. Whereas once beginning pencillers would hone their skills and make their mistakes on 5-page backup strips, now they were invited to work out the bugs in pages of **Amazing Spider-Man**! I firmly believe that all comic books are not created equal and that certain titles deserve the best talent available. Apparently, someone at Marvel agreed with my chauvinistic belief. After some lackluster issues by people who didn't really have a feel for the amazing arachnid, editor Tom DeFalco searched high and low for one pair of creative people who could *commit* themselves to **Amazing Spider-Man** and give this twenty-year-old title their all. If upstarts like **X-Men** and **Daredevil** could get the red carpet treatement, why not the wall crawler?

It is almost too soon to tell, but Roger Stern and John Romita, Jr. have brought a new excitement and interest to Spider-Man with their early work on the title. The reader expects this team to stay together for more than a few issues, allowing them to finish what they start and to give the fans a chance to gauge their abilities. Junior doesn't have his father's background or experience (senior can draw war, western, romance and super-hero, with equal aplomb!) but the son is growing with talent rapidly, and if he and Stern truly stick with the title, for Spider-Man fans both old and new, it will be worth the wait!

AS IT WAS BEFORE:
HE REMEMBERS THE DAY HE FIRST MET GWEN STACY...HIS FIRST DAY AT COLLEGE.
THEY'D EACH BEEN UNSURE OF OTHER'S FEELINGS--AFRAID TO TAKE THAT FIRST AWKWARD STEP.
AND THEY FOUND THEMSELVES IN LOVE.
THE HAPPINESS--THE TRAGEDY--IN A RUSH, IT ALL COMES BACK TO HIM.

THE SPIDER & I

The latest news from the Mighty Marvel Comics Group is that their stellar attraction is in a sales slump. Temporarily, I'm sure. I always thought that Spider-Man was impervious to consumer disinterest, like Superman. No matter how ridiculous the plot, how hollow the dialog, how out of character the characters seemed, certain super-star super-heroes could weather any circulation storm. Simply put, that which makes Spider-Man a classic, unique archetype can outlast and endure all the various mishandling by certain writers and artists of the newer Marvel Bullpen.

I WARN YOU SPIDER-MAN! IT IS NOT WISE TO TRIFLE WITH QUICKSILVER!
I MUST BRING YOU TO JUSTICE... TO PROVE MYSELF WORTHY TO THE AVENGERS ONCE MORE!
THERE'S GOTTA BE AN EASIER WAY THAN THAT!
ON YOUR FEET, WEB-SLINGER! DO NOT TRY TO PATRON ME UNAWARES!
MY SPEED IS TOO GREAT FOR ANY SUCH MANEUVER!

That the drop in sales should occur now is especially disconcerting to longtime fans as well as, I'm sure, Editor Tom DeFalco. Under his guidance, a younger stable of creative people have made the twenty-year old wall crawler as exciting, or at least as promising as he had been a decade before. There were times, in the not-too-distant past, that I no longer cared if Spidey lived or died. Remember the courtship and almost marriage between Aunt May and Doc Ock?...The Peter Parker and Gwen Stacy clones?...The one-too-damn-many incarnations of the Green Goblin? This kind of unbelievable drivel went on for so long that I quietly suffered and wondered if there wasn't some sort of yin-yang formula for long-running titles...the *greater* the heights, the more *dismal* the fall. Spider-Man seemed to go on during all this time, as a top-selling comic book, if not as a **well-done** comic book. I can remember when it was **both**.

I wasn't in at the beginning, so I can't sentimentally recall any charge at picking up **Amazing Fantasy 15** or **Amazing Spider-Man** 1 from a crowded newsstand. Comic books were considered "junk" reading material in the Kujava household; it took over two years of wheedling and whining and generally wearing down my dear old mom before I could get my hands on my very first comic. It was another year before I felt I had outgrown DC's Superman Family titles and dared to try the decidedly different Marvel Comics Group. A shiny, all-silver quarter garnered a fat, 72-page copy of **Marvel Tales** 3. Among the stories was a reprint of **Amazing Spider-Man** 6, by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. I had come in late, but as fresh as they come.

AND, LONG INTO THE NIGHT, AS SLEEP ELUDES THE TROUBLED YOUTH ---
I AVEN'T EVEN HAD A CHANCE TO LOOK IN ON AUNT MAY...
AS FOR JOLLY JONAH, HIS PAPER IS MORE ANTI-SPIDEY THAN EVER BEFORE!
AND HOW DO I EXPLAIN MY DISAPPEAR-ANCE TO GWEN?
...OR TO HER DAD...WHO'S SHARPER THAN ANYONE KNOWS!
TO SEE HOW SHE'S FEELING NOW!
AND WHAT ABOUT JOE ROBERTSON... RANDY... JOSH--- AND THE OTHERS?
NOT TO MENTION THE KINGPIN--- WHOM I CAN'T FORGET!
OH, BRO-THER! AM I IN GREAT SHAPE!

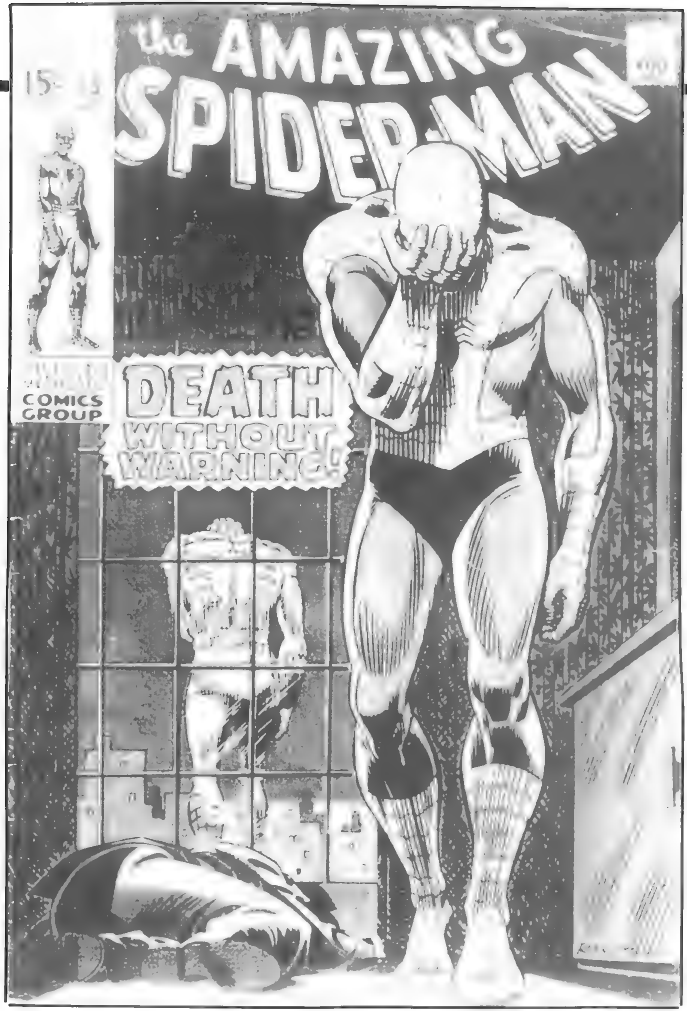
The blurb on the splash page proclaimed, "It is common knowledge that Spider-Man is the most successful new super-hero since The Fantastic Four! (Who were they?) This, the latest, and possibly the greatest of all his adventures, will show you **why** the mysterious masked teenager has become America's super sensation!" I had only to read the 21-page story to be convinced of the sincerity of that statement!

After glimpsing the faraway menace of the Lizard, we switch to the home turf of our hero, get a chance to see him in action against **ordinary** crooks, and meet the alter ego and his friends and supporting players, all in the first third of the story. Then it was off to a strange, uninviting Everglades. I went along for the ride, and a rollercoaster ride it was! A monster that wasn't **quite** what it semed to be, a seesaw battle and confrontation that ultimately wasn't as important as Peter Parker's scientific expertise in preparing an antidote for the hapless Dr. Conners, and Parker's courageous gesture to keep the whole thing secret, at the expense of his very newsworthy photos. In my first, complete-in-one-issue saga I saw, and gloried in, more sides to what makes a super-hero, and a man, than I ever evidenced in an eight-page Superman or Batman episode. For the first time in my short collecting career I was absolutely looking forward to the next issue of a particular title. And the next, and the next...

Helpful to this 'bring-'em-back-again' formula was Ditko's method of weaving continuous, **interesting** plotlines through each issue. The immediate story itself was still complete in one issue, having a definite beginning, middle and end. Parker's life had become so interesting that even a one-page look at a new potential danger or further twist to Peter's mixed-up life was enough to get you to pick up the following edition.

First loves are hard to top, and I'll always rate **Amazing Spider-Man** 6 highly, but even I had to admit that each succeeding issue got hotter and more involving for both Spidey *and* the reader. Ditko was on one of the rolls of his career, and it lasted for over three satisfying years. Steve reached a peak with the trilogy in 31 — 33..."If This Be My Destiny," "Man On A Rampage," and "The Final Chapter." Peter had graduated from high school and entered college where he was to meet new people that were to intertwine with his already chaotic lifestyle. Our man in the spider suit would never again be the same shy, hard-luck kid we all identified with through those difficult teen years. Like his redership, Spidey was growing up, and it made for more compelling entertainment. Our hero had to go through his rite of passage, his test of manhood, and for a dizzying, breakneck, three-issue marathon, the web-spinner never let up for a second to catch a breath as he uncovered and fought his greatest nemesis, raced against time and all odds to save the life of Aunt May, and ultimately triumphed over his final enemy...his own human weaknesses and fears. Not only was this Lee and Ditko's finest hour, but their character's as well. This kind of pull-out-all-the-stops, fast-paced saga has been imitated by others in **Amazing Spider-Man** — but never equalled. (Not that the last sixteen years are without merit!) The creators had taken their creation, shaped and guided him slowly and believably, and brought Spider-Man to a fitting climax at a crucial crossroads in his life.

The next few issues of **Spider-Man** were nice but not remarkable. For reasons which are not clear to anyone except the gentlemen involved, Lee and Ditko were about to part company. As with many great creative duos in many mediums, the two are opposites in style and temperments. Lee is loud, brash and a tireless self-promoter (no criticism implied) while Ditko is quiet, serious, and most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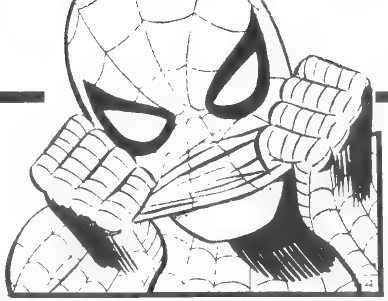
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
COMICS GROUP
DEATH WITHOUT WARNING!

often lets his work speak for itself. These two very different men, melded together as a unit, produced outstanding work. But not without some friction.

One of the old industry rumors as to why Ditko left Marvel had it that Stan told Steve to draw more like Jack Kirby. To 'ape' Kirby was an unwritten law, and from what I've been told by other artists who have dealt with Lee, he does speak with a bluntness and sometimes tactlessness that can offend and startle certain shy, retiring types. Though it makes for good gossip, I don't think it explains much. Ditko was used to Lee. He could discount his editor's statement and work in his own distinctive style. Such a bald attitude by a co-worker could add fuel to a growing fire.

The other rumor revolves around the who-is-Green-Goblin issue of **Spider-Man** that Ditko and Lee were working on. One story says that Ditko had planned that **Flash Thompon** be revealed as GG! Another had Ned Leeds as the villain who would learn Spidey's secret identity. Whoever Ditko's choice was, Lee disagreed and opted for Norman Osborn as the baddie. Ditko probably objected to a less well-known character, from out of left field, who had not clashed with



Parker in his everyday life as had Thompson or Leeds. This was not the sole reason for the split between Lee and Ditko, but it was the straw that broke the artist's back. Unfortunately, unlike in comic books where there are clearcut good guys and bad guys, in real life, when creativity and business mix, there is only human fallibility. **Spider-Man** was only a comic book, so it went on. When 39 appeared on the stands, it featured the artwork of a new/old professional...John Romita.

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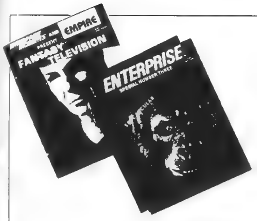

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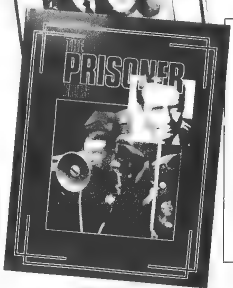

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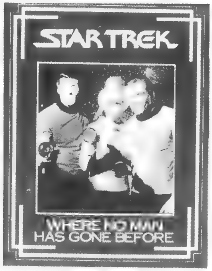

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In the years since, Spider-Man has grown and matured while facing more than his share of tragedy along the way (although Aunt May is still alive even after all these years). Today Spider-Man is still often misunderstood and branded as a manace but it looks like he might even be getting married in the near future as Stan Lee (current writer of the Spider-Man newspaper strip) is coordinating his efforts with Marvel to have Peter marry simultaneously in the strip and in the comics. Will this work out or will it be just another Spider-Tragedy? Only time will tell for in the life of everyone's favorite wall-crawler almost anything is possible!

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